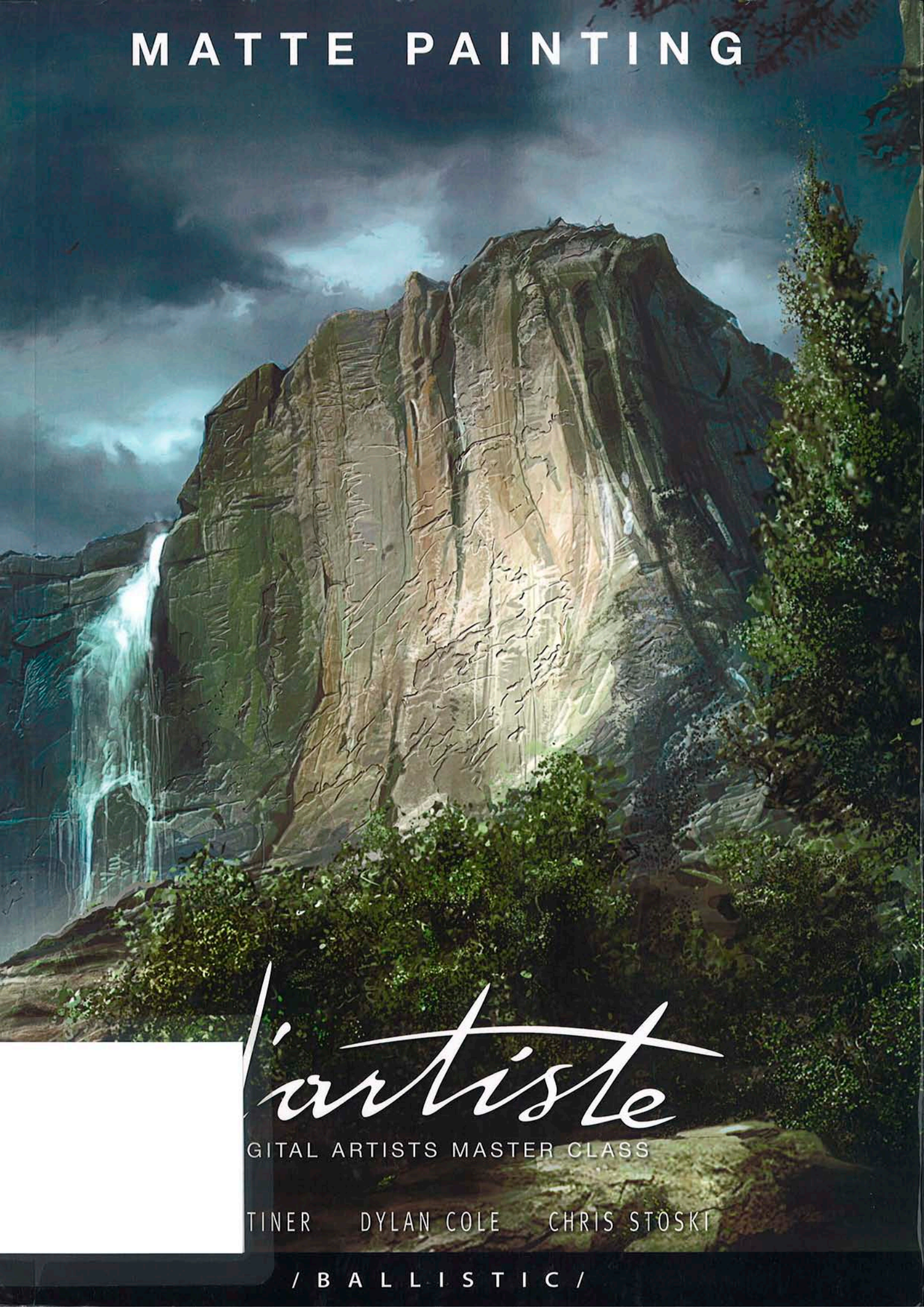


MATTE PAINTING



Artist

DIGITAL ARTISTS MASTER CLASS

TINER DYLAN COLE CHRIS STOSKI

/ B A L L I S T I C /



Matte Painting is the third book in the d'artiste Digital Artists Master Class series. It features the artwork and techniques of Master Artists: Alp Altiner, Dylan Cole and Chris Stoski. In addition to matte painting techniques (including work from Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith), Matte Painting shows each artist's overall approach and how they choose subject matter that works. The book also features a huge invited artist gallery chosen by the Master Artists.

Edited by Daniel Wade

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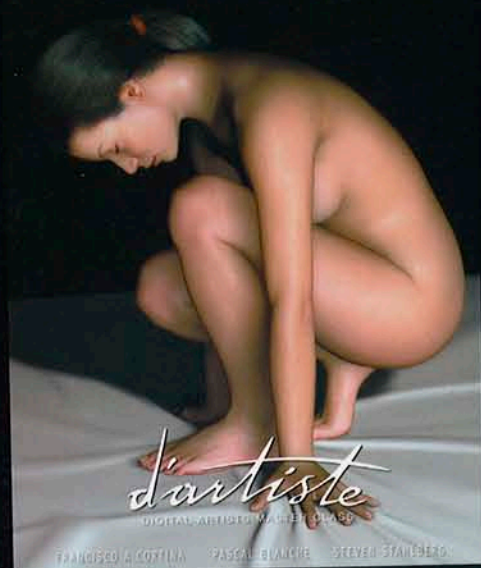
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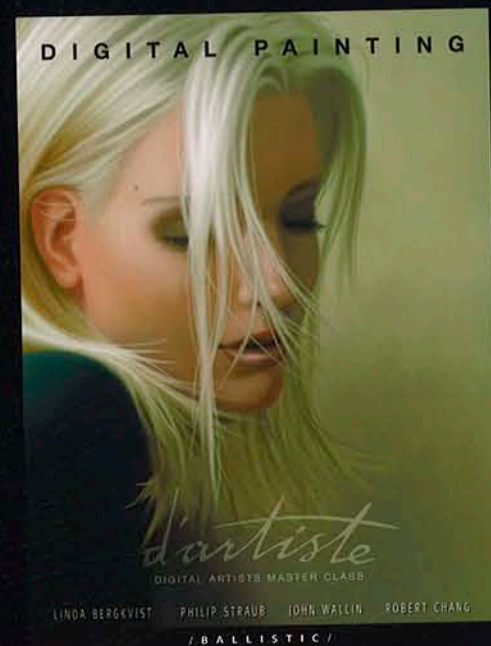
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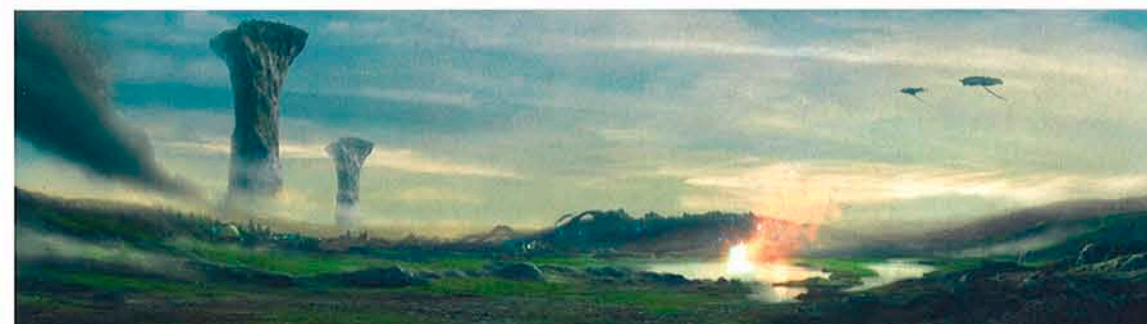


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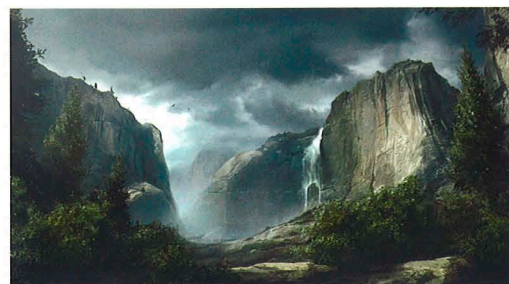
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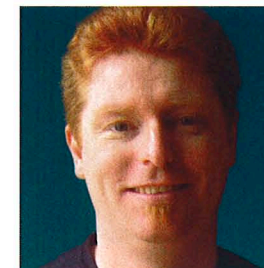
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Welcome to the third book in our Digital Artist Master Class series. The d'artiste imprint (pronounced dah-tee-st) means both 'of the artist' and 'digital artist'. Each d'artiste title features techniques and approaches of a small group of Master Artists. However, the focus of d'artiste books is not limited to just techniques and technical tricks. In addition, we also showcase galleries of their own work and other artists' paintings that inspire them. Along with artist interviews this gives the reader a comprehensive and personal insight into the Master Artists—their approaches, their techniques, their influences and their works.

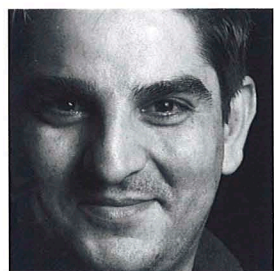
d'artiste: Matte Painting showcases the work and technical prowess of: Alp Altiner, Dylan Cole and Chris Stoski. Each Master Artist presents their matte painting techniques through a series of tutorials which start with the original concept and step through the painting process to completion.

d'artiste: Matte Painting is broken into three sections based around each Master Artist. Artists' sections include a personal gallery, the artist's work and thoughts in their own words, a large tutorial section, and an invited artist gallery featuring paintings from some of the most talented digital artists in the world.

Ballistic Publishing continues to expand the d'artiste series to encompass all aspects of digital content creation. Look for d'artiste Character Modeling which follows the art and techniques of three world-leading character modelers in Pascal Blanché, Francisco A. Cortina and Steven Stahlberg. Visit www.BallisticPublishing.com for new titles.

On a personal note, it has been a privilege to work with such high calibre artists whose iconic work is featured in many of the biggest movies of all time. In particular, through the entire production of d'artiste Matte Painting Chris Stoski has battled serious illness with absolute courage. We're grateful to have shared in this process with him and wish him a speedy recovery.

The Editors
Daniel Wade and Paul Hellard



ALP
ALTINER



DYLAN
COLE



CHRIS
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d'artiste
DIGITAL ARTISTS MASTER CLASS



MATTE PAINTING

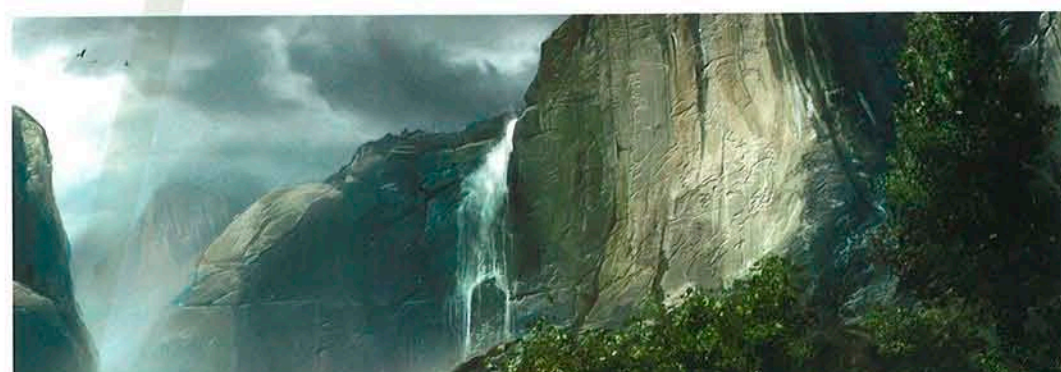
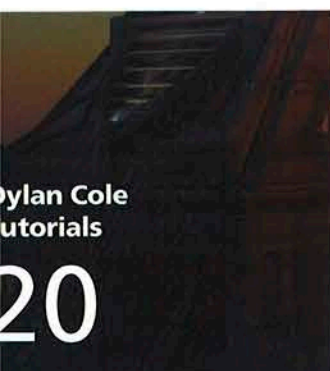
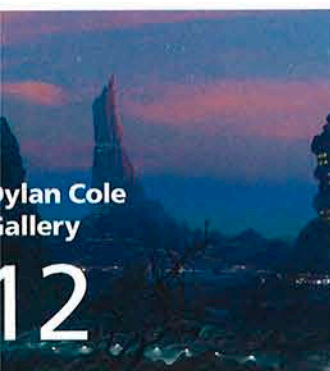
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DYLAN COLE

Dylan Cole is a leading matte painter and concept artist specializing in work for film, television, and video games. After graduating from UCLA with a degree in fine art, he took his painting skills to the computer. He got his start with a brief stint at Illusion Arts on 'Time Machine'. Smaller jobs as a matte painter and concept artist led to him working at Rhythm and Hues on 'Daredevil'. He then left his native California to go to New Zealand to be a senior matte painter on 'Lord of the Rings: Return of the King' for Weta. Cole returned to the US as Lead Matte Painter on 'The Chronicles of Riddick' for Rhythm and Hues where he transitioned to Visual Effects Art Director on 'The Ring 2'.





Background

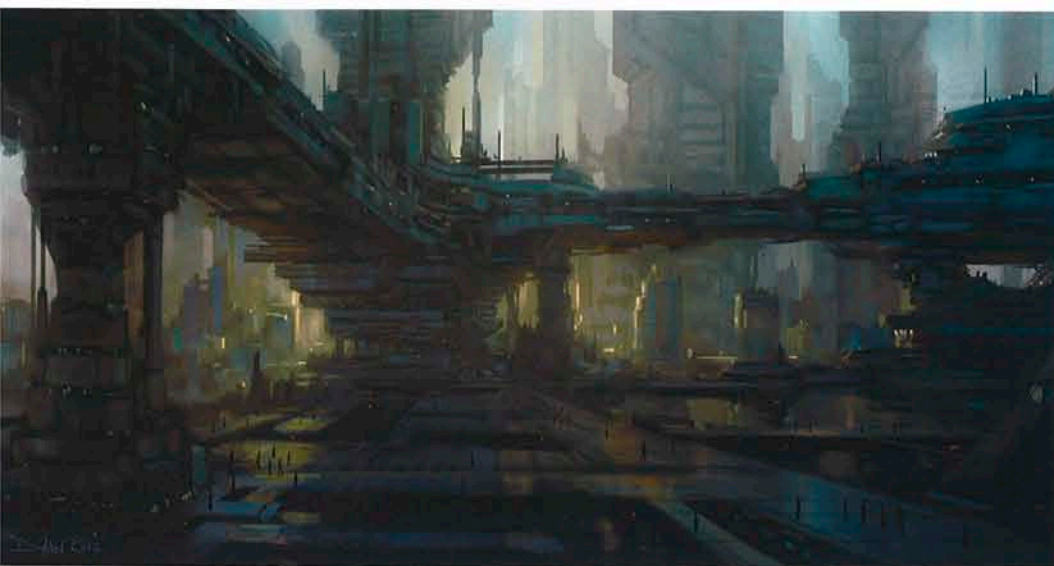
I was always drawing at a young age. I wasn't particularly good at it—I just enjoyed it. I would sit around and draw space battles from Star Wars or Superman. I was the type of kid who would make cards for my parents on birthdays, or Mother's Day and Father's Day. I think on more than one occasion my Mom had a Star Destroyer on her Mother's Day card! Nothing says motherly love like the Empire. I turned a corner when I started reading comic books when I was 10. I started drawing them and began to realize that I was doing it a little better than the other kids. That was when I had my first ambition in art—I really wanted to be a professional comic book artist. I would sit in my room for hours drawing my own characters. My parents were incredibly supportive, my Dad took me to San Diego Comic Con every year and waited in line for me to get autographs and see panels. My young artistic life took another turn when I first began to paint.

I think I was 15 when I first started acrylic painting and I knew I wanted to paint for the rest of my life. After high school I went to UCLA as a fine art major. My painting skills had progressed and I mainly focused on that in college. UCLA is a very contemporary, art-minded school, which meant they were more interested in the why's of the work and not the how's. So in that sense I am pretty much self-taught when it comes to painting. During this time I was doing a lot of surrealism, heavily influenced by people like Dali, and various sci-fi illustrators.

The lure of Hollywood

When I first started painting I wanted to be a book cover illustrator having enjoyed the work on Michael Whelan, Jim Burns, James Gurney, and others. What really changed things for me was when I got the 'Art of Star Wars' books and saw matte paintings for the first time. I guess I was about 18 at the time. Here was this beautiful science-fiction

art that was completely realistic, and it was on screen for all of the world to see! This seemed like the perfect application of painting for me. In my painting I had mainly been interested in environments more than characters and I was always trying to paint them more and more realistically. Matte painting really called to me. Artists like Michael Pangrazio and Chris Evans soon became my artistic heroes. Once I fell in love with matte painting, I started to do some research about it and soon found out it was all being done digitally (this was around 1997). I was crushed because I really loved traditional painting. I was also something of a traditional art snob. I had some friends who were doing digital art, but I wanted nothing to do with it. I would tease them about cheating and not being real artists because they needed a computer for help—all of the stuff that drives me crazy now when people say it to me! Needless to say, the joke was on me.



Fi City sketch: A quick color and compositional study completed in a few hours.

at really got me going with digital was when I was at UCLA and I got an internship at Industrial Light & Magic (ILM). I got in based on my traditional paintings, but they said they wanted me to start painting digitally. This was in 2000 and until then the only thing I used a computer for was to write papers for school. I had never used email until then. I was very serious so I emptied my savings to buy a Power Mac and a big Apple display. It was pretty funny when I was on my internship because I was surrounded by world class matte painters, and I was bugging them for Photoshop help. They were very tolerant of me and supportive. By the end of the summer I had the basics down pretty well. Instead of doing many different paintings, I worked on the same two paintings for months and months, refining and refining. I think I painted those things probably five times over. I could figure out something and only what I had learned to the rest of the painting. I spent my senior year at UCLA in my room

until my work started to look like what I saw at ILM. My digital art progressed rather quickly, and I think it was because I was only exposed to the best. I was around some of the best matte painters in the world up at ILM and that is what I aimed for. I wasn't involved in the online community so I didn't see what everyone else was doing. Nobody at my school was doing that type of work so I had nobody to compare with. I thought it was unfortunate at the time, but I think it helped me. As I progressed I became more comfortable doing quick color sketching in Photoshop. I really began to use it as a paint tool, instead of just for matte painting type of work.

Into the commercial world

The first real job I had was with Illusion Arts shortly after I graduated from UCLA. I had sent out dozens of portfolios to every visual effect house I could find. I had heard nothing from any of them, but two days after I sent my portfolio to Illusion Arts, Syd Dutton called me and asked me if

I wanted to come in for an interview. I ended up doing concept work for matte paintings on 'Time Machine'. I learned a lot from Syd. He really took me under his wing, which I am incredibly grateful for. The other artists at Illusion Arts were also very helpful. Unfortunately, my stint there was brief. Shortly thereafter, September 11 happened. Everyone was out of work, and I didn't work again for five months. I picked up a few random commercials and music video assignments, but my big break came when I joined the art team for 'A Sound of Thunder,' and I was off to Prague for 12 weeks. It was a dream. I was in a beautiful city doing futuristic city designs. Life was good. I came back, and then things really snowballed from one thing to the next: 'Daredevil' at Rhythm and Hues, and then right after that I was off to Weta for 'Lord of the Rings: Return of the King'.

Tools

I mainly use Photoshop for my work—it is the industry standard and really can't be beat for matte painting work. Especially with the

latest couple of versions which have made some big leaps. I would like to play around with Painter for concept paintings, but I haven't had time to get into it. I have seen people do some amazing things with it. I am a diehard Mac guy, and I use a Wacom tablet. I am getting into 3D with Cinema 4D. I have really come to enjoy Cinema because it is very user-friendly and Maxon are really trying to cater to matte painters. Something like Maya is complete overkill for an artist like myself. I don't need all of the high-end features that it offers, and a lot of the simple stuff is complicated because of it.

Inspiration

As far as matte painters, I have had the privilege of working with Robert Stromberg over the past year or so. He is a fantastic matte painter and visual effects supervisor. I learn something from him almost every time we talk. One of the main things that I have learned is restraint. I always need to reign myself in; too often I will make a painting overly-detailed or complicated. Robert knows how to do a shot with simplicity and clarity. His compositions are very impressive. Other matte painters whose work I really enjoy are Mark Sullivan, Deak Ferrand, and Yanick Dusseault. As far as pure inspiration I will always go back to the Hudson River School Artists, like Church and Bierstadt. Those guys had color and composition down.

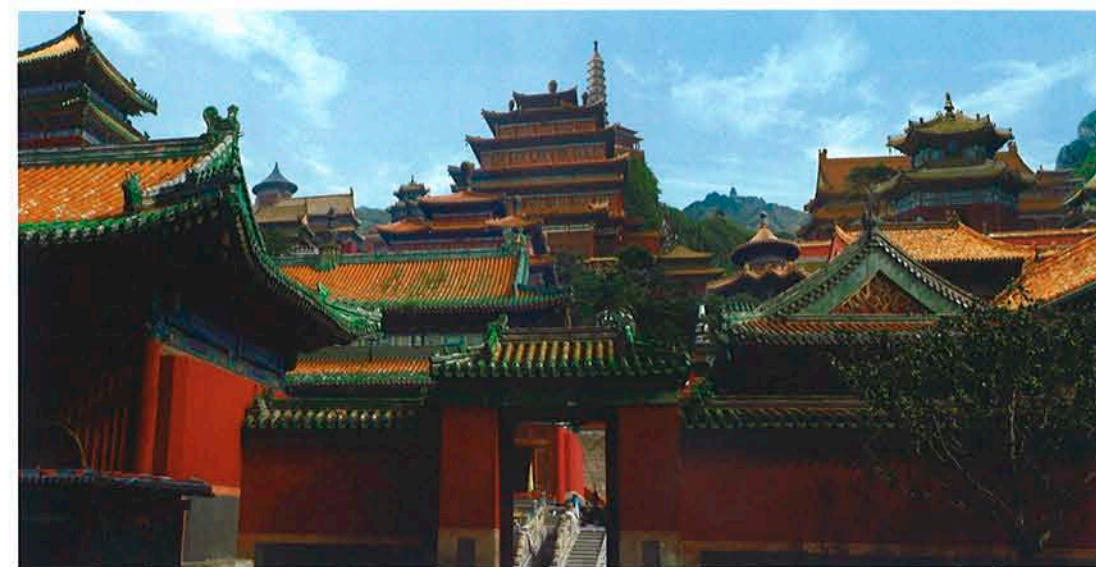
Working in a team

I think the hardest thing about matte painting is to let go and realize you are just creating one shot in a big film and that it has to fit. You are part of a team and not creating a piece of art for yourself. When painting for film you really have to think about context and continuity. You need to know what is going on in the scene, and what

cuts surround your shot. When you are doing a painting for yourself, you can do whatever you want and take whatever license you need to. When you are doing painting for film, often your painting is meant to just enhance the live action and not be the star. I also went from enjoying illustrators because of the high amount of detail in their paintings, to looking at artists who really nailed color and composition. These are the two things that are most important to a matte painter. Detail is just time.

The process

The process is to first talk with either the visual effects art director or the visual effects supervisor about the requirements of the shot. They will normally tell me what is going on in the scene and the surrounding cuts. Sometimes they will give me a concept painting or even just a pencil sketch telling me what they want to see in the shot. Sometimes it is very specific artwork with composition and color worked out, and other times it is just a little scribble with a lot of talking and arm waving. I then take their sketch, and I do my own on top of it to establish exactly where things will go and what the color palette will be. I then get this approved by the visual effects supervisor and sometimes the director. After I do whatever revisions are needed of the sketch, I start work on the final painting. Once I have a somewhat completed painting, I then go through another round of revisions with the supervisor and the director until everyone is happy. I find the fewer people involved in approving a shot, the better. When there are too many people offering comments, the work gets watered down and stale. Usually, the first instinct is the best one.



Chinese Temples: A personal matte painting using a lot of reference that I photographed in China.

Satisfaction

I am probably most proud of the work I did on 'Return of the King'. I am not sure if it is my best painting, but I think I am proud because I contributed a lot to the film. I was fortunate to create some pretty iconic shots. Alan Lee and Jeremy Bennett had a lot of faith in me and trusted me with some challenges. It was also the longest I have been involved with a project. I learned a lot while working on that film. It was fun to contrast the first paintings I did with the last ones—there was definite improvement. Other projects were satisfying for different reasons. 'Daredevil' was a lot of fun because often I would be given a green screen plate and simply be told: "Okay, they are on a roof and there is the city behind them." I also enjoyed some of the paintings I did on 'The Aviator', just because it was pretty invisible work. Most of the stuff I have worked on has been really big, sci-fi/fantasy stuff that no matter how good you make it look, the audience still knows that it is not real. I think I would like to do more period drama work. Every project is different because

of many reasons, subject matter, work environment, the people you are working with, technical pipeline, etc. I think that is why it is still fresh and exciting to me, because every job is so different.

Breaking into matte painting

I would advise potential matte painters to learn traditional drawing and painting skills—especially basic perspective. There are far too many photo monkeys out there who can only collage photos together. They may integrate them well and balance them all together, but the perspective is all off, and the composition is wrong. I must again refer to the Hudson River School; just look at how they handled light in their work—amazing. Other artists rely too heavily on 3D and don't know how to create anything without it. I think 3D is a fantastic tool and is the future, but it can be a serious crutch—especially when someone can't lay out some basic 3-point perspective grids without it.

Virtual environment artists

I think the term matte painter is already an obsolete term. To be honest, I have never done a real matte painting. Those days ended with digital. Now we are virtual environment artists. I think there are more, and more 3D environments being created these days, and matte painters will have to adapt to keep up. It is becoming more common for there to be teams of people on an environment instead of a matte painter. I also think that more stuff will go procedural, and matte painters will be taken out of the picture for basic stuff. Though I do think there will always be a need for a matte painter simply because it is often the easiest and most cost-effective way to create a shot. A simple, locked off shot with a set extension will probably be done as a matte painting for many years to come. The other advantage to matte painting over 3D is that you have so much more control, and changes are much faster than having to do a re-render.



Rocks Along the Beach

For this piece I was mainly driven by the desire to paint a scene at dusk. This is one of my favorite times of day because the lights of the city are starting to turn on and there is still light in the sky. I wanted to imply a civilization where structures are built right into the rock. I think the small details, like the dried-out trees, give it a random real-world feel.



Saucer Hill

For this piece I thought of classic science fiction with the very simple, rounded architecture. I built myself a 3D model for reference and added a lot of small detail to the structure to give it scale. I was thinking about artists like Albert Bierstadt and Frederic Church when I did the lighting. I thought I would try a dutched angle and dramatic perspective to make this piece stand out.

[above]

Cave City sketch

For this sketch I began by painting large random blobs of color. I then used this as my rough composition and palette. I then began to add detail and refine the shapes. A large interior city emerged. This is a piece that I would enjoy finishing into a detailed matte painting.

[left]

Sci-Fi Sidewalk sketch

Whenever I have a free moment and I start to doodle, it almost inevitably becomes some sort of futuristic city. I tried to come up with unique, more whimsical, shapes for this piece instead of the typical stuff we see. I enjoy the energy of loose sketches.

[right]





Urban Plateaus

In this piece I wanted to explore the idea of a futuristic city where real-estate is even more of a premium than it is today. I pictured buildings built so close together that they eventually become large masses shaped like plateaus, or buttes, maximizing the waterfront property. I used many different buildings from all over the world and a lot of painting to create this image.



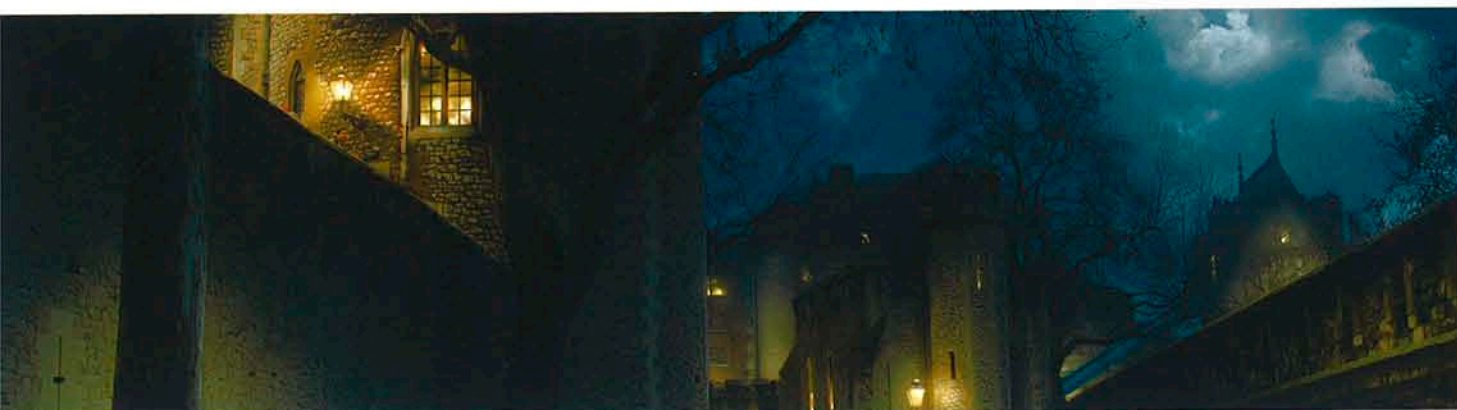
Barad-Dur and Mount Doom

This was the matte painting for the destruction of Barad-Dur at the end of 'Return of the King'. The tower was a CG model built for the collapse, but the rest of

the environment was a matte painting. For this shot I animated the pyroclastic cloud and interactive glows in After Effects to give the effect of a large erupting volcano.



'Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King' ©2005 New Line Cinema. All rights reserved



MATTE PAINTING: TOWER OF LONDON

Inspiration and subject

I've always loved old medieval architecture, castles in particular. I was very excited when I got to visit the Tower of London, because it had a lot of the classic castle qualities, with the towers, high walls, and battlements. I chose this photo of the Tower of London because it had a lot of depth, and it also had a street to lead the viewer into the painting. I wanted to create a moody kind of night shot with a lot of atmosphere and shadowy streets. It also had the nice trees in the frame to give it a more eerie feel as well as giving a different texture to the piece.

Technique

This is my basic technique for doing a day for night shot. The key is to layer the PSD to give a lot of flexibility. When darkening images down this much, one must be wary of losing bit depth. That's why I work with a lot of adjustment layers and layer masks, so that I always have the freedom of change. I start by adding a Curve adjustment layer that darkens the entire image. I then go into the adjustment layer's layer mask and paint areas that I want to remain lit. This is how I create my pools of light. I add subsequent layers to add windows, shadows, and haze. Depending on the shot, I may add a new sky. When choosing a sky I generally use

daytime, backlit skies, so that when I darken them, they resemble backlit, moonlit clouds.

Composition

I was conscious when I took this photo of creating a balanced composition that led the viewer into the painting. I let the big tree on the left frame the lit buildings. I spotted lit windows throughout the frame to create a visual path that leads from the top left, through the center, to the distant building on the right. I was conscious of the fact that we read left to right and wanted my composition to flow in a similar way.





Plate

This is the starting plate that I shot at the Tower of London. Overcast photos such as this offer nice possibilities for day-for-night paintings because of the lack of direct sunlight and hard shadows. It allowed me the freedom to light the photograph in any way I wished.



Adjustment layer to create night

I used Curves on an adjustment layer to darken down the entire plate to what felt like a nice bluish night. A lot of care was taken at this stage because the curve dictated the main palette and exposure level. I did this on an adjustment layer so that I'd have the freedom to change it later without losing bit depth in the original plate.

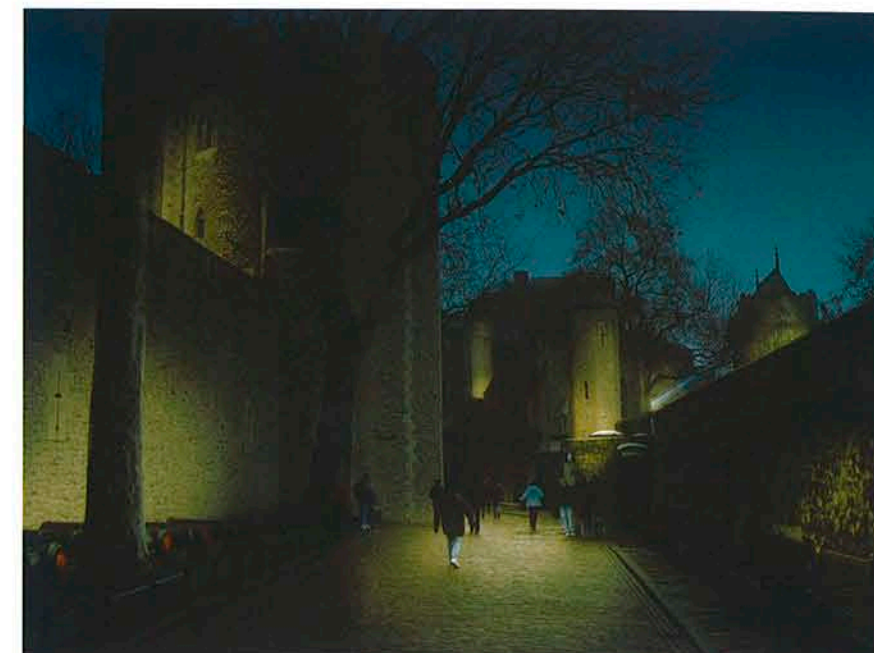


Painting into the layer mask

I painted into the adjustment layer's mask to define the lit areas of the painting. The areas that I painted black would not be affected by the curve layer. Here's what that mask looked like by itself. The painting was done with a large, soft, round brush and then I used the Eraser to clean up edges.

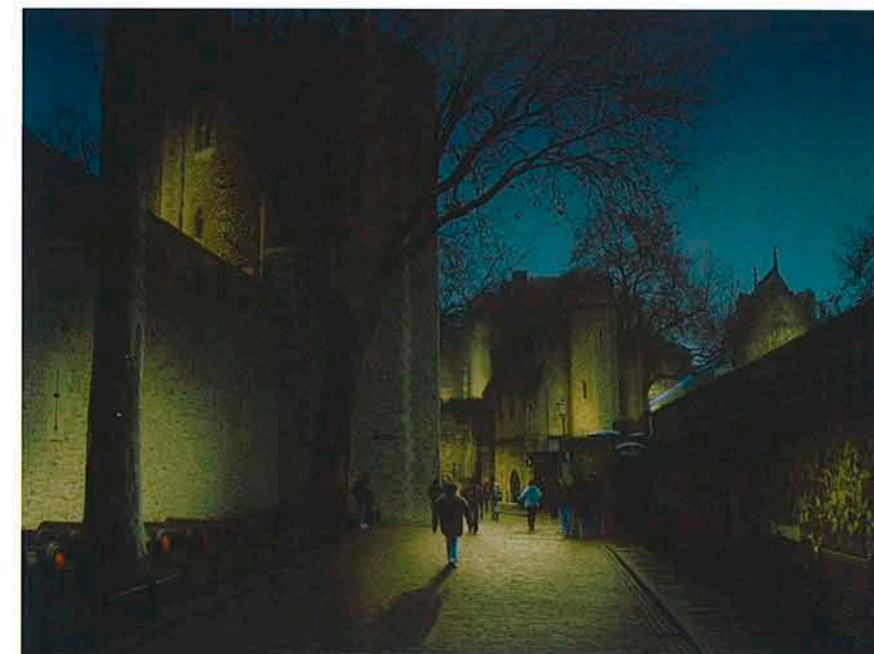
Layer mask painting

Here are the results on the image of painting into the layer mask. Pools of light were created with special attention being paid to the light direction. I tried to think about how these buildings would be lit in real life. Most often the light would be coming from street level, so I lit most of the buildings with an up-lighting. I tried to create pools of light in a balanced way that lead the eye through the painting.



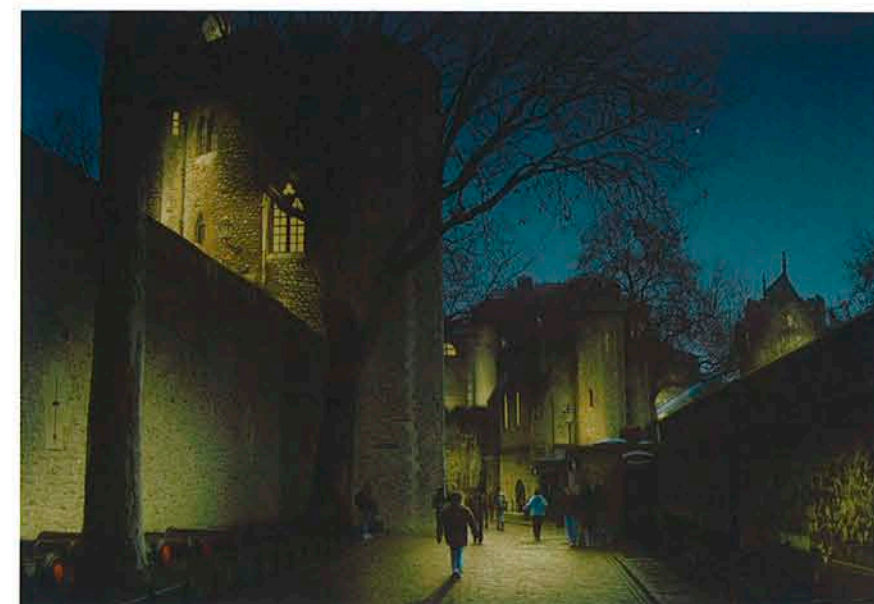
Interactive shadows and more lighting

I continued to paint into the layer mask to reveal the lit street and also to add interactive shadows on the figures. These touches created a focus in the center of the image. Also, by adding the cast shadows from the figures, it clearly defined the direction that the light is coming from.



Blocking in the windows

On a new layer I painted in the lit windows with a solid color. At this point, the color and detail did not matter as much as just defining the shapes and placement of the lit windows. It was really tempting to go in and paint every window, but I didn't want to overdo it. I would typically go too far and then have to reign myself in by erasing about half of the windows that I have painted.





Creating window detail

On the window layer, I clicked on the Preserve Transparency button in the Layers palette. This allowed me to paint on the layer without going outside the bounds of my original window shapes. I used large soft brushes to add gradations of color in the windows to simulate lit rooms, and I also added some brighter light sources. I was not concerned with painting in every detail in the rooms, instead opting to imply detail. With this type of exposure, the lit windows would be overexposed anyway. I also created a new layer for the street lamp in the middle of the painting and the light on the outside of the tower on the left.



Adding the clouds

After creating some interactive light on the Tower on the left, I pasted in a sky that I photographed that had some clouds that I thought would work well for night. Backlit clouds, such as these, work well when simulating a moonlit sky. Building up a library of clouds is very important for a digital matte painter. It is good to categorize them by time of day as well as kind of cloud. Always having a digital camera on hand is a good way to quickly build up a reference collection.

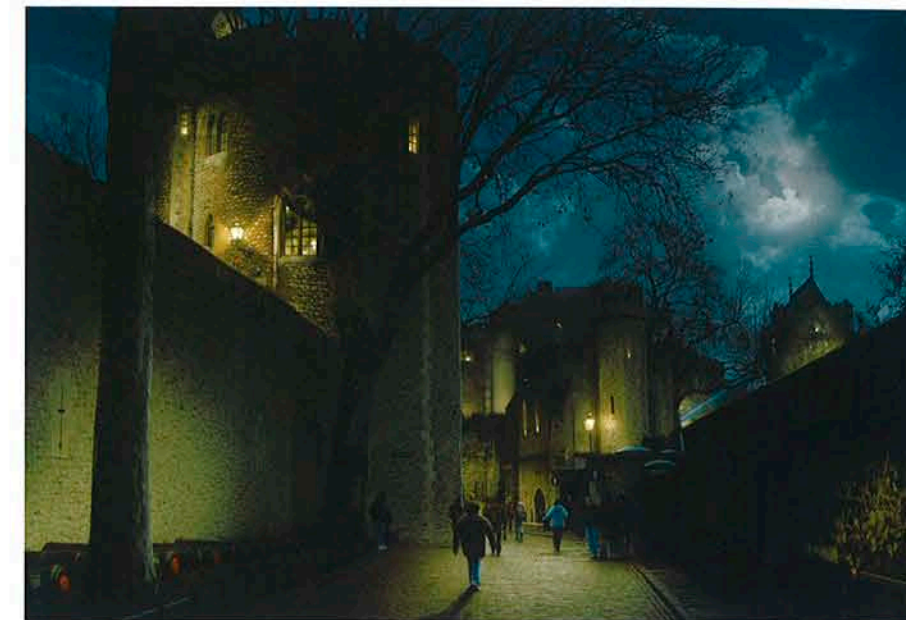


Foreground mask

In order to place the sky into the painting I needed to create a matte for the foreground. I did this by looking at the color channels from the original plate and selecting the one with the most contrast between the sky and the rest of the image. I duplicated that channel (the blue channel), and used Curves to increase the contrast until the black and white image separated the sky from the foreground.

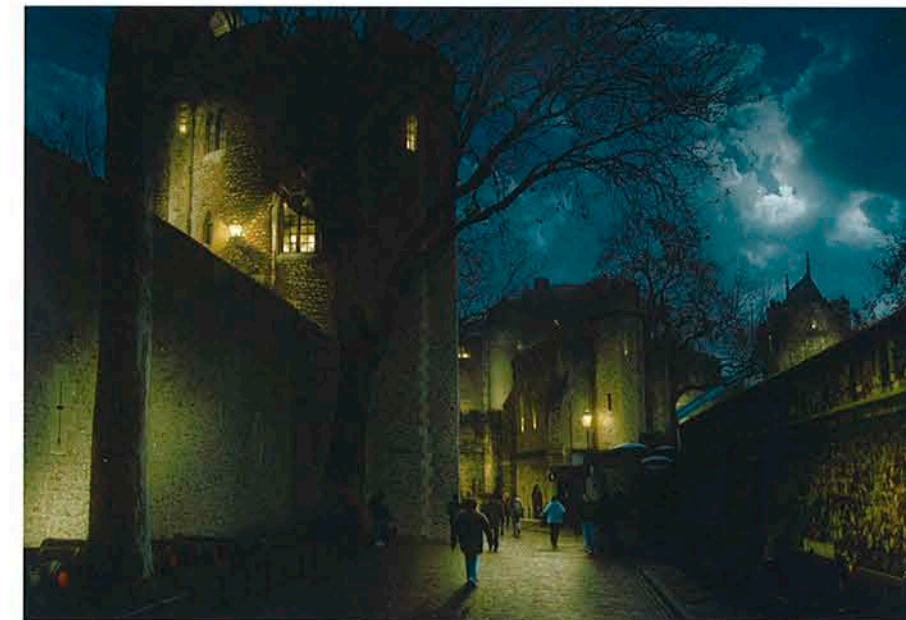
Integrating the sky

I created a layer mask for the sky layer and then copied and pasted the foreground mask from the Channels palette into the new layer mask. I created a new Curves adjustment layer and created a clipping mask with the sky layer so that the Curves adjustments were only affecting the sky. Using Curves I darkened the sky down to a more nighttime look. I then painted into the adjustment layer's mask to add a glow in the center of the sky to imply a moon behind the clouds.



Refining lights

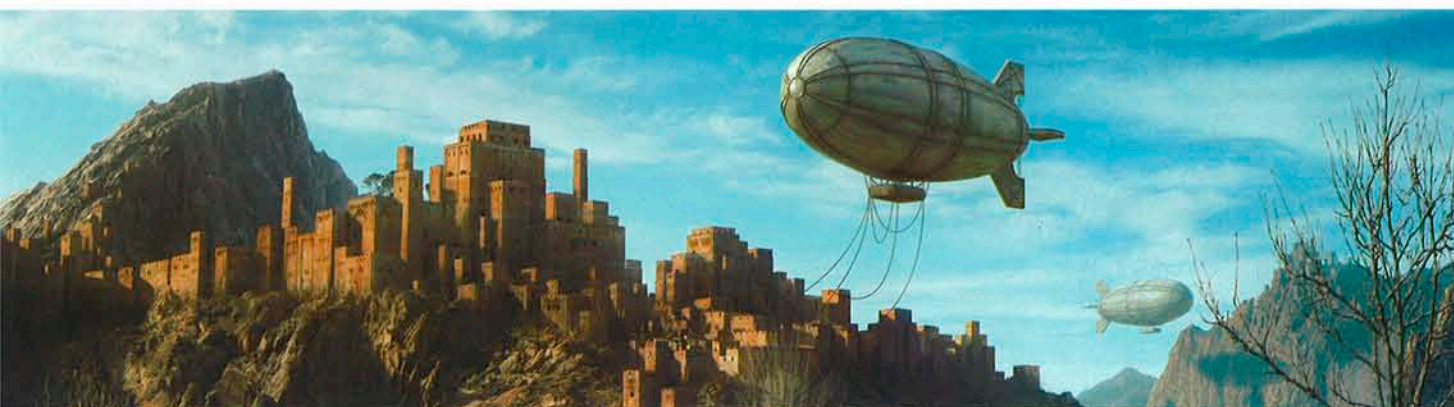
I went back to the center of the painting and added a little bit more light to the center buildings. The tops were getting a bit too dark. I lightened them to imply more distance between the viewer and those buildings to give the painting a bit more focus. I also added a little more light to the right side wall. It was just too much of a massive black shape. I did all of these adjustments in my original Curves adjustment layer.



Final touches

To finish it off, I created a new layer to add a bit more haze and atmosphere. I sampled a medium value from the sky and using a large soft brush I painted some haze onto the distant buildings. This created a bit more depth and separation in the painting and made the image feel a bit more moody.





MATTE PAINTING: DESERT CITY

Inspiration and subject matter

For this piece I was thinking a lot about ancient cities of the Middle East. There was something about the very simple architecture that I found appealing. I thought it would be a nice contrast to the usual complexity of my work. I also thought it would be a welcomed challenge to do a painting in harsh sunlight. Often, matte paintings are helped along by being either backlit, monochromatic, or very atmospheric. All of these things help to obscure a lot of detail and lighting challenges. Daylight is much more difficult. I also thought I would add a bit of whimsy with the airships.

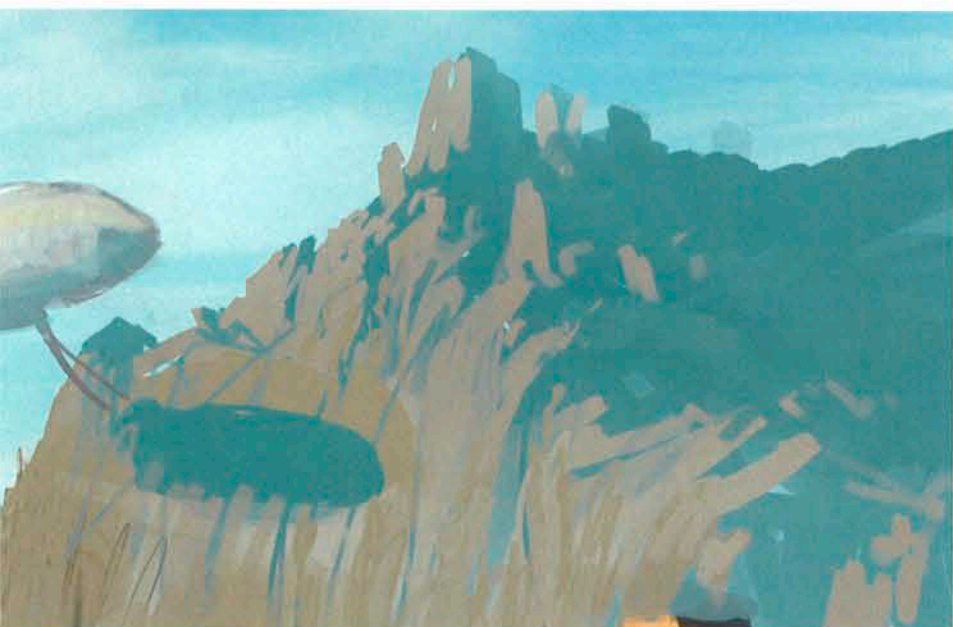
Technique

For this piece I use many different techniques, many having to do with photo manipulation and integration. I also discuss how to build a city using very simple shapes and colors. I then go into detail about adding texture and realism using both layering techniques and painting. A painting of this size can be very cumbersome in Photoshop with all of the layers, so I like to make use of layer sets so that I can navigate through my layers easily. I also like to save out multiple versions of my painting so that I can flatten certain areas, yet retain all of the separate layers in another file.

Starting point and composition

To begin this piece I had a tiny photo with some desert rock that I liked. I painted over that and created a color sketch of the composition. I tried to find a nice rhythm through the piece. I also have a road leading the viewer's eye into the painting. This is a rather obvious method of leading the eye, but I thought it was appropriate as a way of taking the viewer to the city. I tried to be conscious of scale and depth by having repeating shapes receding in space, such as the buildings and airships.





Sketch and sky

My initial sketch was done over a little bit of photo that had some rock in it. The photo can be found just below the main structure. I started from the photo simply because I liked the quality of the desert rock. This sketch was done in a little over an hour. It was a very quick study to determine color and composition. For the sky I used a couple photographs that had a nice wispy texture. I wanted a very simple sky to not detract from the landscape and something simple to place the airships against. However, I did not want a boring gradient, so I opted for the light wispy clouds to add texture without cluttering the composition.

Background painting

I zoomed in and began detailing the background. I used mainly small round brushes and began detailing the rocky mountains using the colors that I had established in my sketch. At this distance it was basically a two-toned painting: a highlight; and a shadow. This made for quick painting and just the implication of detail.

Background detailing

I continued to detail the background and also used some photo texture from some rocky cliff faces. I used the texture by copying it into a new channel and making a high contrast version of it. By making a selection of the new channel, I could now paint on my background with a large soft brush to lay in the rocky highlights. I inverted the selection and painted into the shadows. This technique works best on distant objects, or monochromatic objects, because by doing this you are only using the value of the texture and not the color information.

Raw photo reference

I placed a patch of rocky photo reference where I wanted it in the image. I also paid attention to try to find the right scale for the detail and rocks so that it felt believable. I was careful to find an image with light direction coming from the right because even though it is harsh sunlight, I would darken it down so that it looked like ambient fill light.

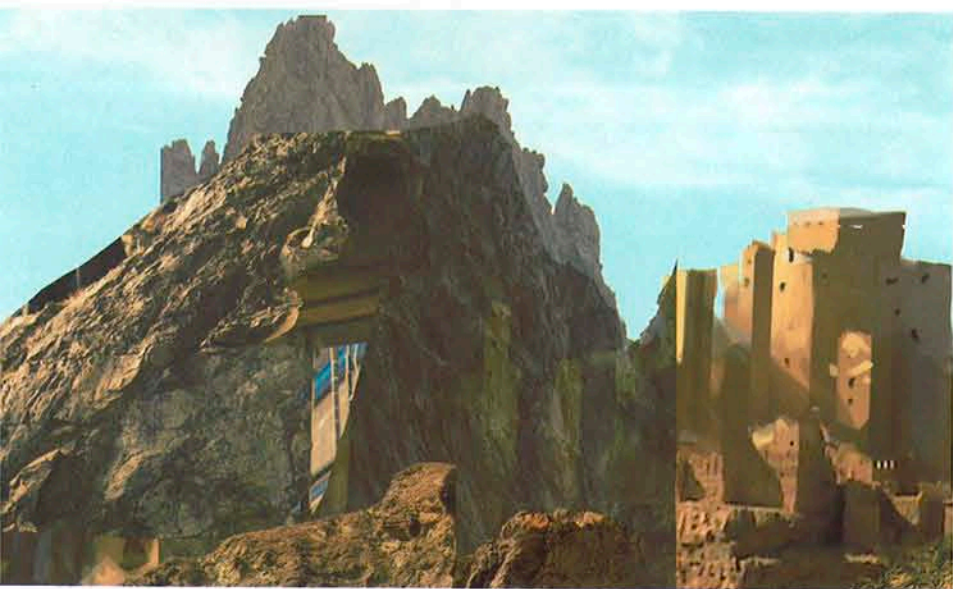
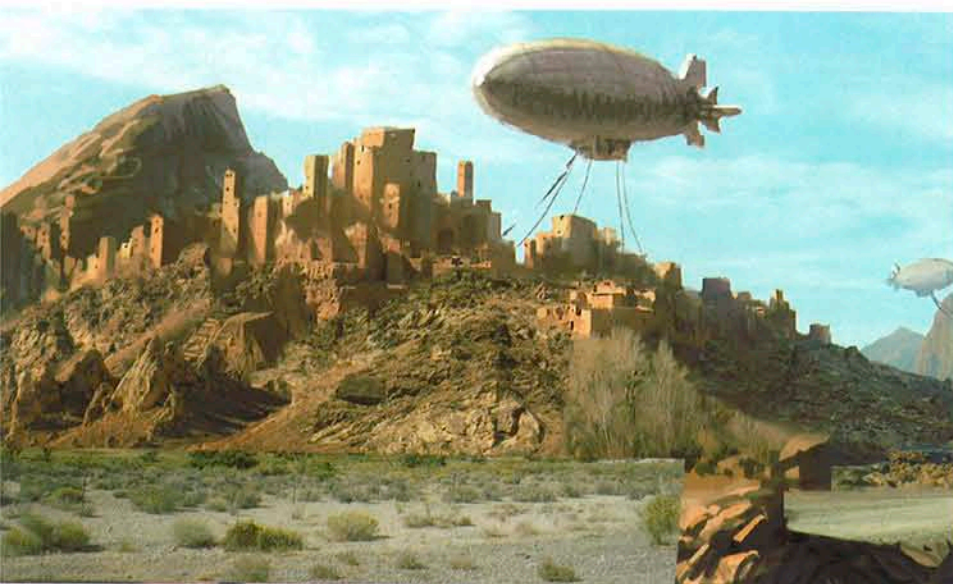
Photo integration

Here's the photo after it had been color-corrected. I used Curves to get the color to match my sketch. I then used a Color Overlay blend mode from the Layers palette to reduce the contrast of the layer. This is really the key to helping the texture sit into the scene. I also added a layer mask so that I could blend the edges of the layer without having to commit to erasing them.

More rock details

I continue to add some photo elements from rocks or desert elements that I had shot. I was mainly concerned with getting consistent scale, light direction, and contrast. I was not concerned with every element blending into one another—that would be handled with painting later. At this point, I was laying in the foundation of texture and detail.





Raw ground texture reference

I placed in some reference that I shot in the Sierra Nevadas. I actually shot this specifically for this painting. I was up fishing for a weekend and brought my camera. This is the ideal situation for gathering reference because you know exactly what you need. You can keep an eye out for the right lighting and perspective.

Adding rocks and trees

I roughly placed in some more elements. I found the rocks along the coast, but I thought they would work well in a desert situation. I color-corrected them, but the sloppy, water edges were still visible. This part of the painting was basically like a jigsaw puzzle: you're trying to find little pieces to cover as much of the painting as possible. You're also establishing the kind of detail you will be painting later on.

Texturing the left mountain

Rough photos are placed for the mountain on the left. I chose to use rocky reference more than mountainous reference, because I wanted the landscape to feel fairly harsh. The mountains are supposed to be a natural defense to the people of this city, and I didn't want it to look easily scalable. I continued to use the Color Overlay blend mode to help the photos fit into the scene—particularly on the shadow side. Sometimes, I will decrease the opacity of the layer to allow some of the color of the sketch to come through and decrease contrast in the texture layer. I would then use layer masks to blend all of the edges of these elements.

Dried trees

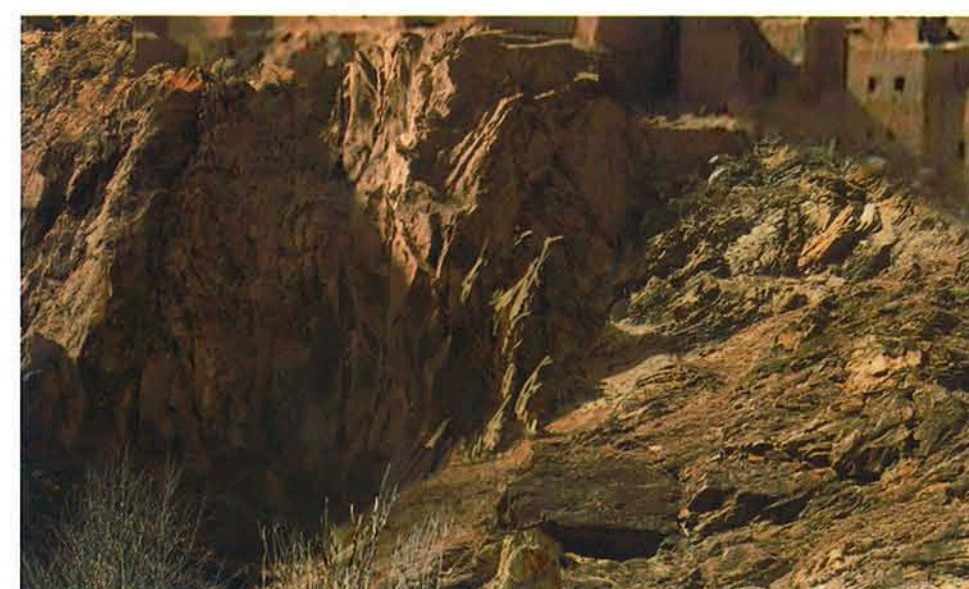
In order to create the dried trees, I used some extensive layering. I had some good reference of dried trees but there was no lighting as they were only silhouettes. To create light and dark, I overlaid several different layers of trees, alternating between a highlight color and a shadow color. This isn't a perfect method, but it does work at a distance such as this. We can then go in and add specific highlights and shadows to create the look we want.

An overall look

I stepped back to look at where we'd come so far. Most of the major photos were in place, and I had stuck pretty faithfully to my composition—maybe too faithfully. I was not completely happy with the foreground rock placement, but I would play with it later. It still needed a lot of integration, but I could see where it was going.

Beginning the rock integration

I created a new layer and began painting in a lot of the detail between the rock photos. I was thinking about how these rocks interact and transition to one another. I paid special attention to cast shadows and the natural flow of textures. Since I was painting this at double film resolution, I didn't have to worry about painting pixel perfect.





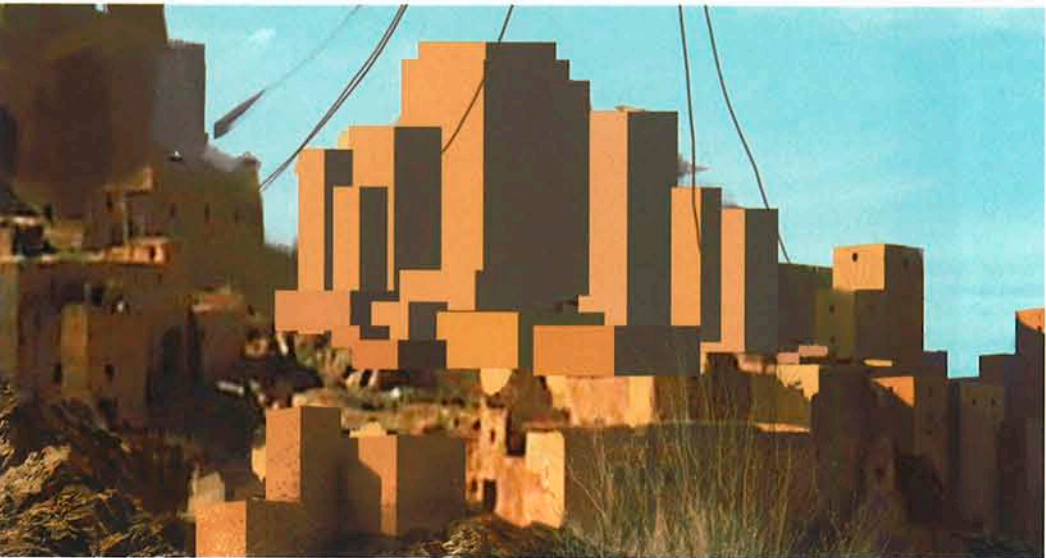
Micro composition

Working in this zoomed up view, I began thinking about micro-composition, or how small elements played against one another. I was very conscious of how light and dark shapes would help establish depth. You can see how I placed light colored trees against a dark background, but the bottoms of these trees are dark against the highlighted ground. This was all an effort to make the image read clearly and quickly.



Building blocks

I made a very simple two-toned cube using the Marquee tool. This would be the basis for all of my buildings. I duplicated this and distorted it many times until I had the basic layout for the bottom buildings. I continued to think about light and dark playing against one another.

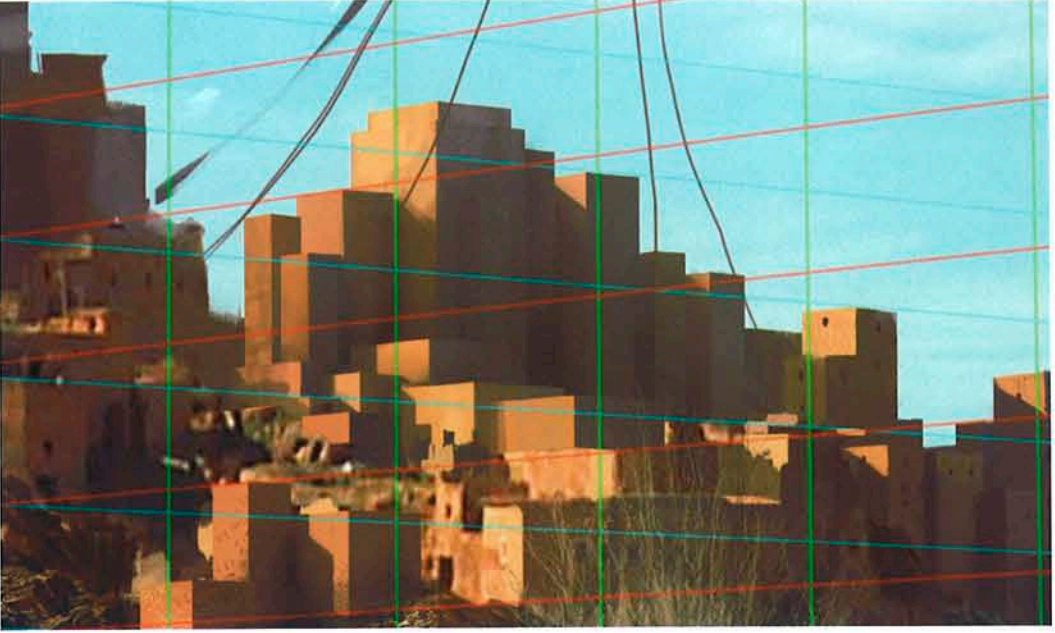


More blocks and color variations

I continued to duplicate these cubes around to create different parts of my city. This was a very quick and effective way to try different arrangements without a lot of sloppy painting. I kept every building on a separate layer so that I could easily move them around. This made for a very cumbersome PSD file, but I'd flatten it once I was happy with the composition. Using the Hue/Saturation adjustment, I began to introduce some color variation to my blocks to suggest the natural variance in stone that would occur in a city like this.

Creating perspective

Using a perspective grid created with the Line tool, I began to paint and erase into the buildings to make them sit into the proper perspective. I also began adding cast shadows to give more definite sense of how the buildings were sitting with one another.



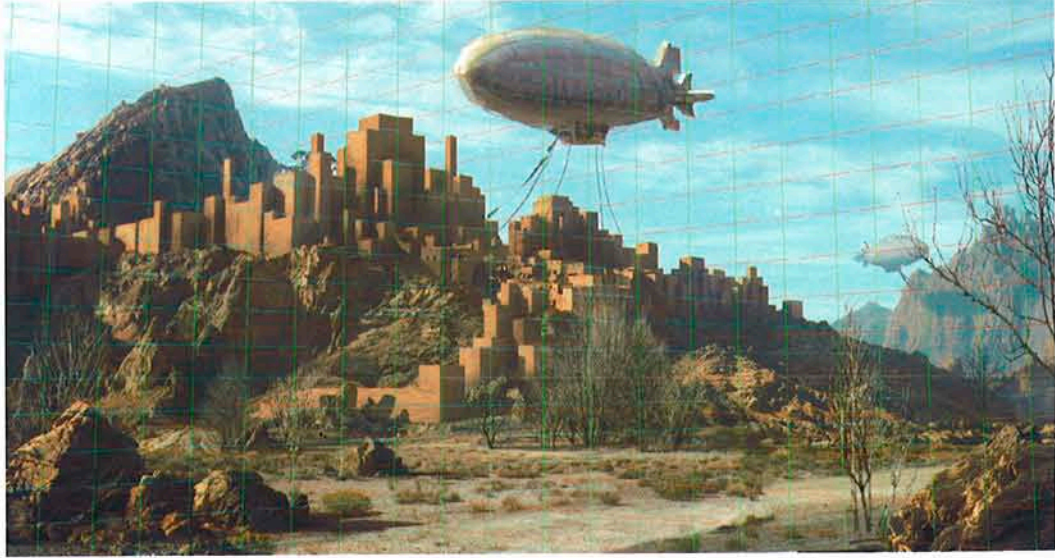
The entire blocked in city

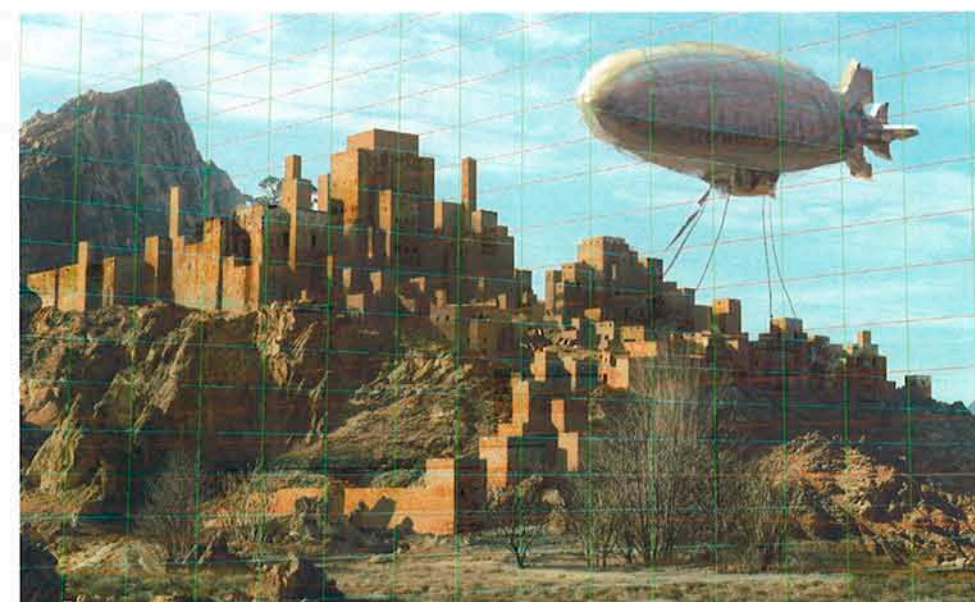
The whole city was now blocked in with simple blocks. I also started adding small bits of window detail and color variation. I tried to create a natural, flowing shape to the city that looked as though it had been added onto over the years.



Balancing the composition

I was feeling that composition was a bit heavy on the right side and that our eye was traveling too easily off the right of the image. I decided to try a large tree to lead the viewer's eye back to the center of the image. I think it worked and created a nice circular motion to the composition. I also simplified the foreground rocks. I felt that it was a bit cluttered and complex so I opened up the middle to show the road and give the viewer a visual entry to the image. I also clicked on my perspective grid to do another check on the city.





Adding building texture

I found a couple small scraps of old rock wall texture and duplicated it around the structure many times. I used the Overlay blend mode to add texture without destroying the values established underneath. Because of the variety of building shapes and sizes I used only a couple photos to create the texture base for the whole city.



Painting in building detail

On a new layer I began painting in small windows and details to individualize the buildings. I created these with a small round brush and sometimes with a custom brush made up of two dots. The brush let me paint two parallel lines for creating pairs of windows that were evenly spaced. I also implied recesses into the buildings so that all of the faces were not so monolithic. This also helped provide scale.

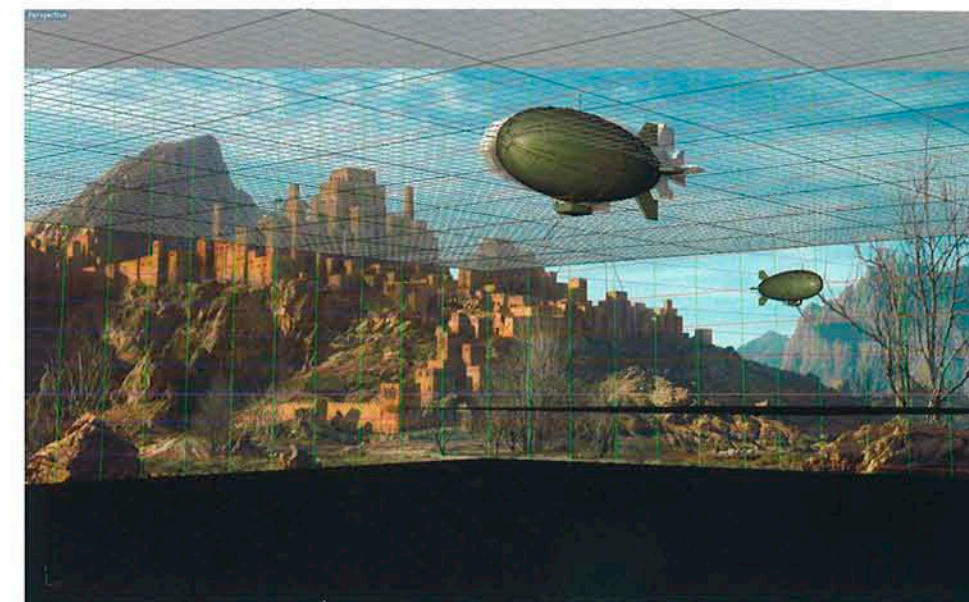


The detailed city

The city was almost finished. Window details and small doors and pathways were added to give interest. I also added bits of trees to the city to give it a bit of life and to contrast the geometric nature of the architecture. Only some small details on the lower buildings remained to be done.

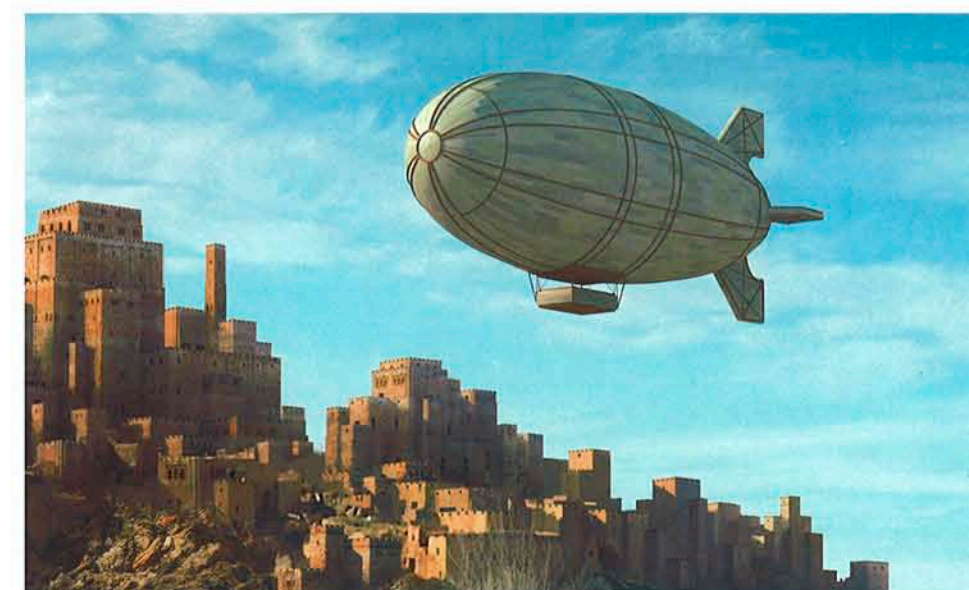
Modeling the airships

I used Cinema 4D to model the basic shapes of the airships. I took great care in lining up the reference plane to my perspective grids to make sure I was using the correct field of view. Since I created my perspective grids from scratch, I didn't know the lens information. I did a bit of trial and error to line up the airships.



The rendered airship

Here are the raw renders out of Cinema 4D of the airship. I used basic plank style shaders to give the patchwork look to the cloth of the airship. The main thing I wanted to get out of the render was the way the texture wrapped around the round shape. This would be very difficult to do in Photoshop.



Final details

On a new layer I painted in detail and texture into the airship. I added a lot of weathering to surface to help it not feel so clean and CG. I also added a lot of small folds where the cloth was bulging at the wooden braces. To finish it off I added some warm bounce light from the ground with an adjustment layer and some tethering ropes created from paths.





MATTE PAINTING: LAVA CITY

Inspiration and subject matter

Other worlds and fictional cities have always fascinated me. I try to imagine places that I would like to go to or wish existed. Often, inspiration simply comes from a color palette, and that was the case here. I wanted to do a futuristic city with this kind of low dusk light. I was trying to think about how this city could be different from others, and I thought of lava, probably because I had just finished working on 'Return of the King' and still had Mordor on the brain. I also thought that lava would give me some interesting lighting opportunities with the glow and smoke that it creates.

Technique

Besides a lot of my standard Photoshop matte painting techniques, I wanted to play with manipulating building photographs.

I was just doing this painting for myself and wanted to do it fairly quickly, so I wasn't interested in doing extensive modeling and texturing. I thought of taking a lot of photographs that I had, mainly of Sydney, and massively squashing them horizontally to make them match the tall, skinny buildings in my sketch. I also laid a lot of these buildings over one another to get a quick accumulation of detail to suggest the scale that I was after. I ended up modeling one of the foreground buildings in 3D, mainly as a way to ease myself back into 3D, but also because I was planning on doing a camera projection with this painting to get a little parallax.

Starting point

My starting point was my initial sketch, inspired by an old photograph I had seen

of smoggy Los Angeles. What was unusual is that I didn't go back to do the final matte painting until about a year after the sketch was completed.

Composition

I chose a fairly standard sort of composition for this piece. I wanted the lighting and subject matter to speak for itself. I kept the foreground buildings dark to focus the viewer's eye towards the buildings in the center. I was careful not to put the main buildings in the dead center of the painting as that makes for boring and uninteresting shot design. I also tried to create a left to right read on the painting, since that is how we naturally view an image.





Sketch

This was the very first sketch that I did for this piece. I started by just blocking in rough shapes and building ideas until I was happy with the composition. I had a grainy little JPEG of an old photo of Los Angeles that I painted over. I tweaked the color quite heavily to make it look like the kind of dusk that I wanted. I also redid the gradients in the sky. I took my time balancing shapes and values in this sketch, and I think it paid off because I barely deviated from this in the final image.

Sky

I removed most of my sketch to work on the sky. I added some wispy clouds to give texture to the sky. I didn't want a lot of detail and complexity in the sky because there would be plenty of that in the city. I just wanted a few small clouds to give depth. I extracted these clouds from photos that I took by finding the color channel that had the most contrast. I then duplicated that channel and made a high contrast matte for the cloud. I really let the haze pile up towards the horizon to show all of the atmosphere and smog in the air.

Ground plane detail

I used a few aerial photos of various cities to give some detail to the ground plane. I paid special attention to perspective, having laid out grids for a basic two-point perspective that I used to line up my buildings. Some liberal use of the Free Transform and Distort tools and my buildings were lined up. I then used Curves to adjust the color and contrast to get the buildings to sit properly in the scene.



Distant buildings and smoke

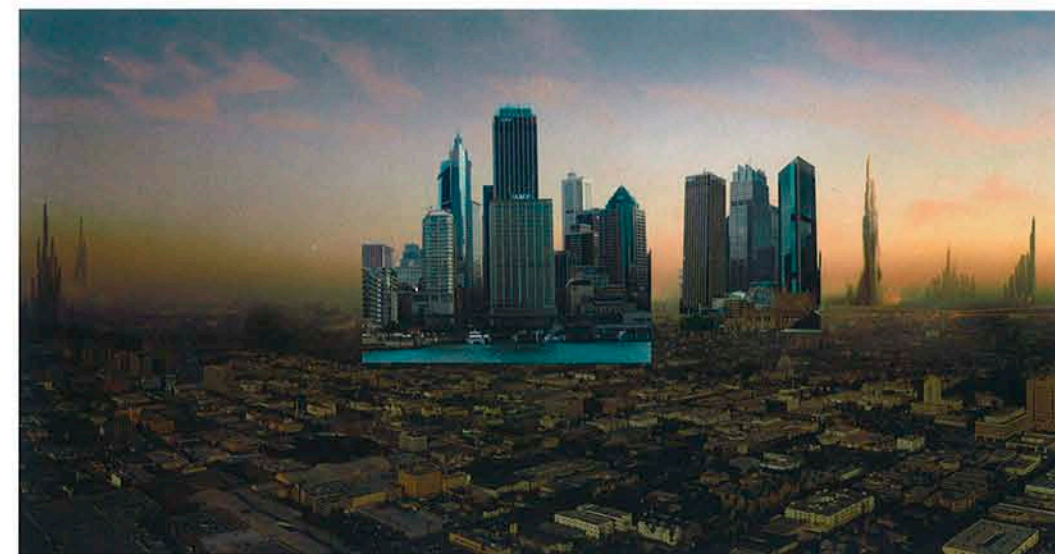
I started detailing out some of my distant buildings. I did this through both photo manipulation and painting. I painted in some distant smoke that had more of a definite source, instead of smog. I paid special attention to the placement of the smoke so as best to silhouette the buildings. I also painted in some distant lava on the right. I did the concentric circles by drawing several circles with the Circular Marquee tool and then stroking them with a red lava color. I used the Transform tools to warp them into the proper perspective.

The source buildings

I placed a few buildings extracted from some photos that I took in Sydney. I would heavily manipulate them, but they were a nice starting point because of the nice detail and lack of recognizable landmarks—at least for people not from Sydney. I didn't color-correct the buildings at this stage to match the painting, but I corrected them to match one another.

Creating new buildings

Here's the result of a lot of horizontal squashing and layering. I used many different buildings and layers one on top of the other to create the building shapes that I made in my sketch. My focus here was more on accumulation of detail while not necessarily making literal sense. I also went in and tweaked a lot of individual faces so that they were in the correct perspective. When massively squashing buildings in this manner, you have to pay special attention to perspective because it gets very exaggerated.





Adding atmosphere to the buildings

I used Curves and Color Balance to color-correct the buildings into the scene. I then used the Color Overlay blend mode to lay in the proper amount of haze. I sampled a color from the sky for the correct haze color. This often takes a little bit of trial and error to get the correct result, depending on how closely you color-corrected your buildings in the first place. I like to use the Color Overlay blend mode because it saved me from creating a new haze layer and it allowed me the freedom of dialing in the right color and opacity.



Adding light to the building tops

I duplicated my building layer and removed the layer effects. I then made a high contrast version using Curves that retained color information in the highlights and moved the darks and midtones to black. I also color-corrected this to a much warmer reddish orange. I used the Screen blend mode to apply the highlights to the painting. I then created a new layer mask and painted into it to have the highlights only affect the surfaces facing the sun. I also added a soft gradient to highlights so that they were only affecting the tops of the buildings.



Adding more smoke and lava

I created a new layer and painted in lava around the main building. In order to get the proper perspective, I painted the basic lava shapes in orthographic view and then distorted them into perspective. I found this a good technique when dealing with complex geometric patterns that need to be in perspective. I then added a haze layer on top of it for adding a lot of atmosphere to the bottom of the buildings. I added some more smoke that had a more definite source along some of the lava. I found that the contrast of soft and hard smoke helped create depth. All of the smoke was created by freehand with soft brushes.

Lower midground buildings

I added some lower midground buildings from aerial photos of various cities around the world. I used the horizontal squashing technique on the buildings to change their dimensions and detail. I placed the buildings so that they were silhouetted against brighter pieces of smoke and distant buildings. I tried to be conscious of light shapes against dark shapes, and vice versa, because it helps establish depth and helps the shapes read better. I added some large roads that travel to the main structure. I painted these with the Line tool and Brush tool. I used my perspective grid as reference to ensure that my lines converged on the horizon.



Raw buildings

I added another layer of buildings taken from many different sources. At this stage, I was just making sure that the buildings worked for perspective and scale. If the buildings were out of perspective, I used the Polygonal Lasso tool to select individual faces and skew them into proper perspective.



Integrating the midground buildings

I used Curves and Color Balance to adjust the buildings to match the painting. I used the Color Overlay blend mode to add the proper atmosphere to these buildings. I sampled a dark color and used that for a gradient on a new layer that faded from the bottom to the middle. This took out a lot of unnecessary detail in the midground and let the viewer's eye focus on the center buildings. I also added a few lights on a new layer as well as some interactive light on the buildings. I restricted this to the bottom midground buildings because that was where the lights would show up the best.





Blocking in the foreground building

Using my original sketch as reference for shape and design, I blocked in the values for the right foreground building. I didn't worry about detail yet—I just wanted the shapes and composition to work. I used a lot of the Polygonal Lasso tool as well as the Paintbrush and Line tool to create hard edges. I also referred to my perspective grid quite extensively.



Detailing the right building

I began detailing the right building by overlaying some concrete texture on the main faces of the building. I wanted to keep it subtle—something to break the large clean surface. I took photographs of buildings at night and used Curves to make everything but the lit windows black. I used a Screen blend mode on this layer to only add to the windows. I moved and erased windows until I was happy with the placement and added another layer to paint in the small up-light on the auxiliary tower.



3D model

I finished off the building on the right with some roof details, like railings and red lights. For the left building I decided to model a building in 3D and use it for lighting and perspective reference. I knew I wanted a lot of small repetitive shapes and 3D is ideal for this. I modeled this building in Cinema 4D and rendered out a few basic lighting passes.

Mixing render passes

I color-corrected the first ambient pass and mixed in a little bit of a key light pass. I kept the key light pass very subtle. I wanted it to be lit from the sun just as our main buildings, but I didn't want it to become the focus. I wanted it to remain fairly dark so that the viewer's eye goes past it to the central buildings.



Window lights and surface detail

Using the same techniques as the other building I began to add detail to the left building. I combined several textures for the surfaces, one geometric from a building facade, and another of concrete with some nice weathering. I used the Overlay blend mode to mix these textures. When using the Overlay blend mode, it is a good idea to neutralize your textures as much as possible, both in value and in color so that only the texture itself is being transferred.



Final details

I painted a few final details into the image. I concentrated on the roof of the left building by adding a white light to show off some of the structural detail. I did this by mixing a lighting pass from Cinema 4D and also by painting. I also added some red lights to the top of the building. Real world details, such as the red aircraft warning lights, are good to add to fictional cities because they are elements that we recognize in everyday cities and lend a certain believability to the scene.





The Mountains
Photoshop
Maciej Kuciara,
POLAND

Dylan Cole

This is a very dramatic image with very strong lighting. I particularly like the light striking the rock face as well as the mist being created by the waterfall. The foreground trees vignette

the scene nicely and help create good separation between foreground, midground and background. It is also impressive that the whole image was hand painted.



The Lab

Photoshop

Dan Wheaton, Carbonmatter,
CANADA

Dylan Cole

This piece has a wonderful mood to it. The pools of light help lead the viewer's eye around the painting. With the dutched angle and the pose of the figure, the artist has created a lot of

energy and movement. This painting could have easily been over-detailed and busy, but the artist simplifies unneeded areas to allow the viewer to concentrate on the subject.



Underwater City
Photoshop
Steven Messing,
USA
[above]

Building
Photoshop, 3ds max
Thomas Crausaz,
UNITED KINGDOM
[right]

Dylan Cole
This is a wonderful piece, very strong with color and composition. The pools of light lead our eye into the image as do the school of fish. The heavy use of atmosphere is perfect to suggest the murky depths of the ocean. There is a very nice restrained use of texture in the rocky spires; just enough to sell the surface, though not so much as to overwhelm.

Dylan Cole
The artist has created a very simple and striking composition. The lighting is very understated and effective. The use of atmosphere on the pyramid is nice to suggest the immense scale.





Haunted Mansion
Photoshop, Softimage|XSI
Tim Warnock, The Next Side,
CANADA

Dylan Cole

Images that imply a story are very powerful, as with this piece and the lone light on in the window. This painting has a very strong composition

and invites the viewer in with the stairs coming to the foreground. Little touches such as the ground fog, help sell the mood.



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EARTHSEA
Photoshop
Copyright Hallmark Entertainment
Distribution, LLC
Rasoul Shafezadeh,
CANADA
[above]

Dylan Cole
This is a strong piece with very good use of atmospheric perspective. The hills fall off into fog in a very believable way. I think the muted color palette works very well in this overcast scene. I also like the bold rock shapes in the near part of the island and the nice use of light against dark.

Spiritual City
Photoshop
Jaime Jasso, METACUBE,
MEXICO
[right]

Dylan Cole
I really enjoy this image. I like the juxtaposition of the eastern architecture with the waterfall scene. The dutched angle and the flying birds give the piece some good movement. I think the fog and haze is very effective, especially where the horizon is obscured on the right side of frame.





Western Town/Night time
Photoshop
Ron Crabb, Crabb Digital,
USA

Dylan Cole
This piece has that classic Hollywood night look with the perfectly composed moon and the moonlight on the buildings. The artist has a good command of perspective and the composition frames the area of the street where the action would take place.



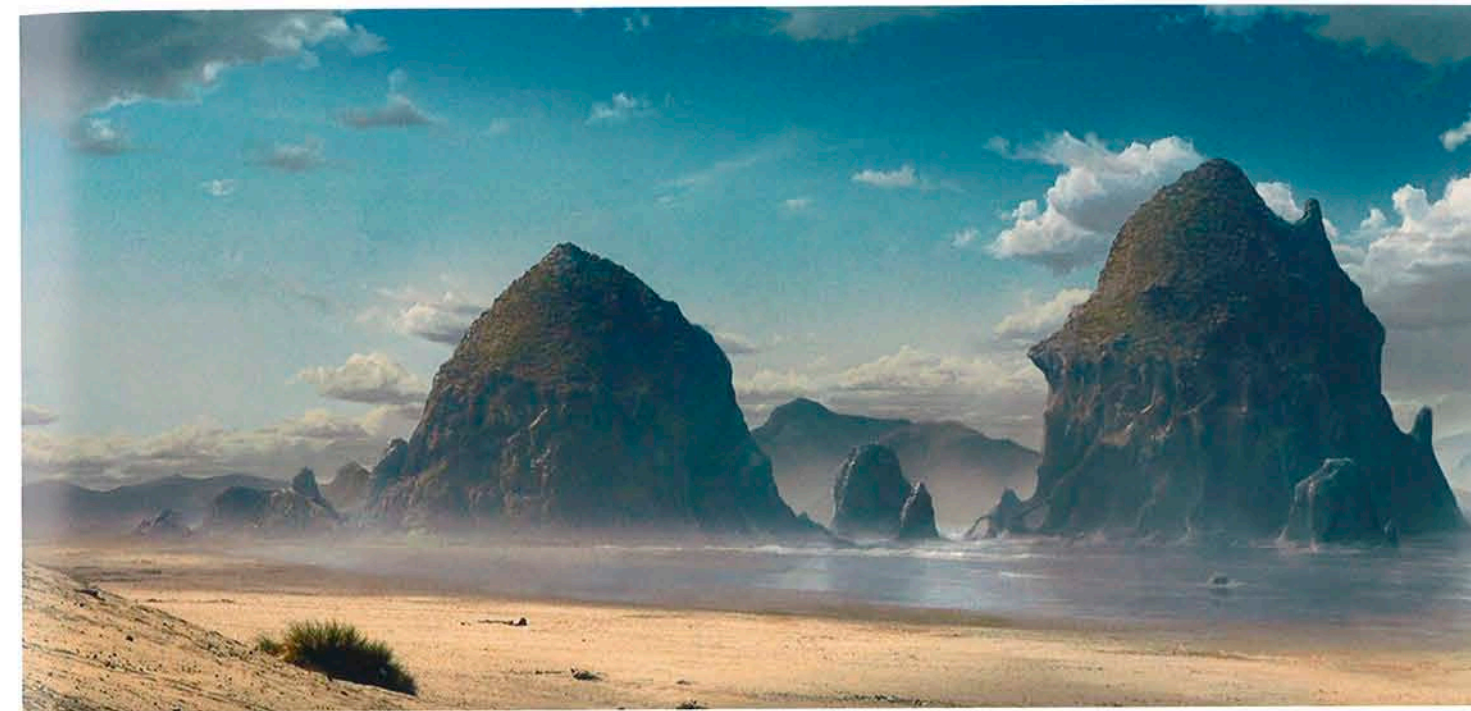


Untitled
LightWave 3D, Photoshop
Christian Haley,
USA
[top]

Dylan Cole
This image is a lot of fun with the curious structure, precariously built. You definitely want to know what is going on in this environment. There is a nice sense of texture in all of the surfaces. I think the main strength of the piece is in the bounce light and attention to subtlety in shadow areas. Reflected light is always a challenge in matte paintings.

Old meets New
Photoshop
Mogens Skjold Overbeck,
UNITED KINGDOM
[above]

Dylan Cole
Like the opposing piece this has a understated beauty with the color palette. The artist chose to leave the sky not overly complicated, letting subtle gradients illustrate the time of day. I also enjoy the quality of highlights on the buildings.



The Beach
Photoshop
Maciej Kuciara,
POLAND
[top]

Dylan Cole
This is a nice subtle painting. I enjoy how the rocks are fantastical in shape, but don't cease to be believable. The color palette is very effective and feels real. I also like how the artist uses the low lying mist to accentuate the rock shapes by playing light against dark.

Old England Morning
3ds max, Photoshop, combustion
Jaime Jasso, METACUBE,
MEXICO
[above]

Dylan Cole
This is a very nice 3D matte painting. There is a real strength in texture and surface, it has a nice lived-in look. I particularly enjoy the back lighting on the left half of the image—especially the 'god' rays streaming over the top of the building on the left.



No Swimming
Photoshop
Tim Warnock, The Next Side,
CANADA

Dylan Cole
I really enjoy the backlit look of this painting. With the warmer palette and bright water reflection, one really gets the feeling of a hot day. The real world touches like the 'No Swimming' sign and smoke elements help sell the realism of the city and flying car.

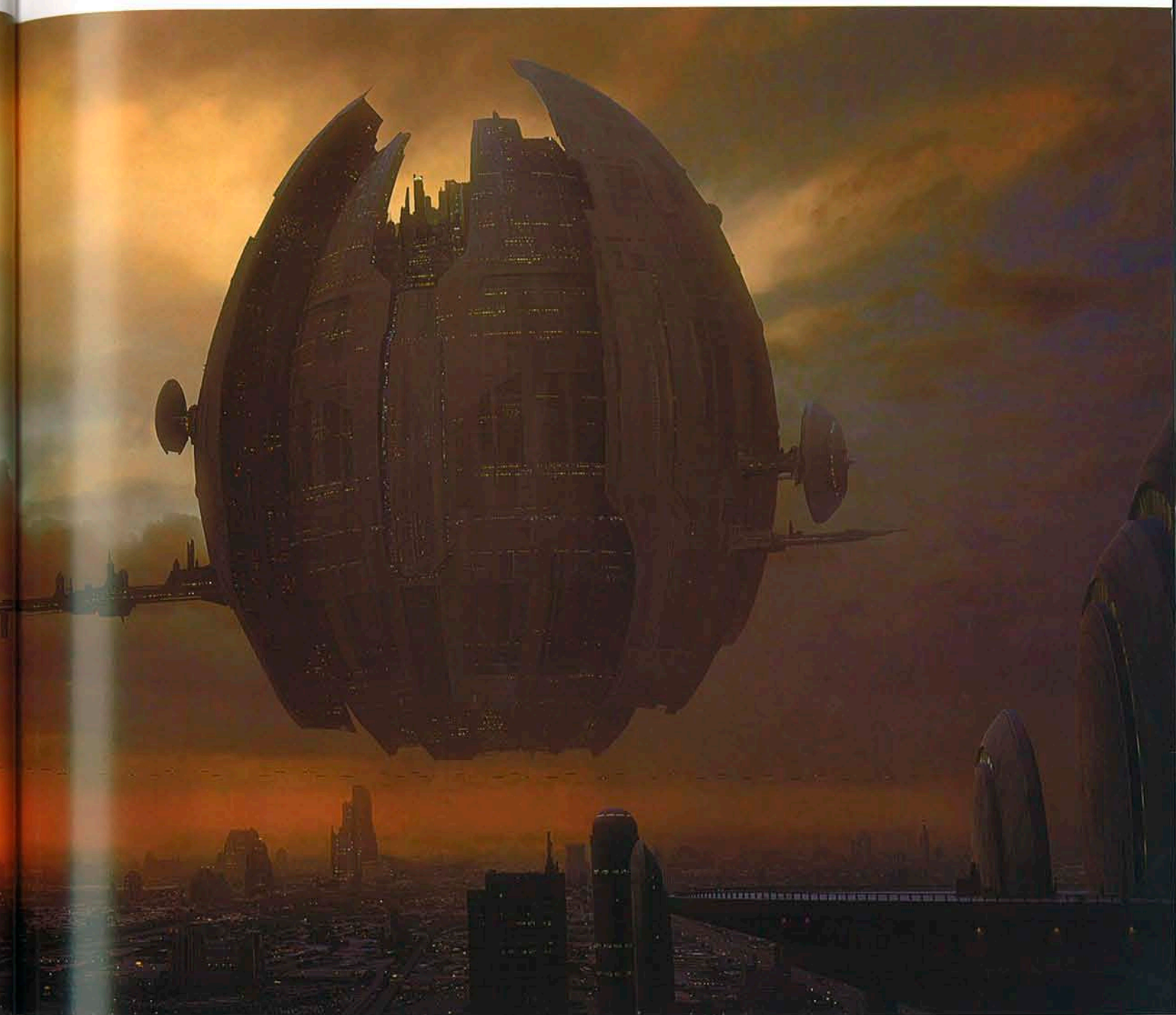


Future City
Photoshop, Maya
Steven Messing,
USA
[above]

Dylan Cole
This is a fantastic cityscape. The subtlety of the colors in the sunset is very nice. Many artists would have oversaturated it. I really enjoy the inventiveness of design with the large floating structure and the execution is well done with the subtle texturing and small lights. Cityscapes such as this tend to get overly complicated, but here the artist has shown restraint to create a bold composition. The atmospheric perspective is handled nicely as the objects recede.

Untitled
LightWave 3D, Photoshop
Christian Haley,
USA
[right]

Dylan Cole
I really enjoy the bold color and composition. This is almost like an abstract matte painting if there is such a thing. There is a very nice rhythm to the piece with the sweeping lines and lack of straight edges. The lines at the edges of the painting curve in, leading our eye back through the painting.





Rock Terrain
Photoshop
Thomas Pringle,
DENMARK

Dylan Cole

The monochromatic feel of this painting really lets the bold composition shine. The repetition of rock shapes from the foreground into the background help to sell the vast depth. The way the

artist placed the viewer far beneath the structure emphasizes their height since we have to look way up to see them. I also enjoy the looming superstructure barely visible in the distant background.

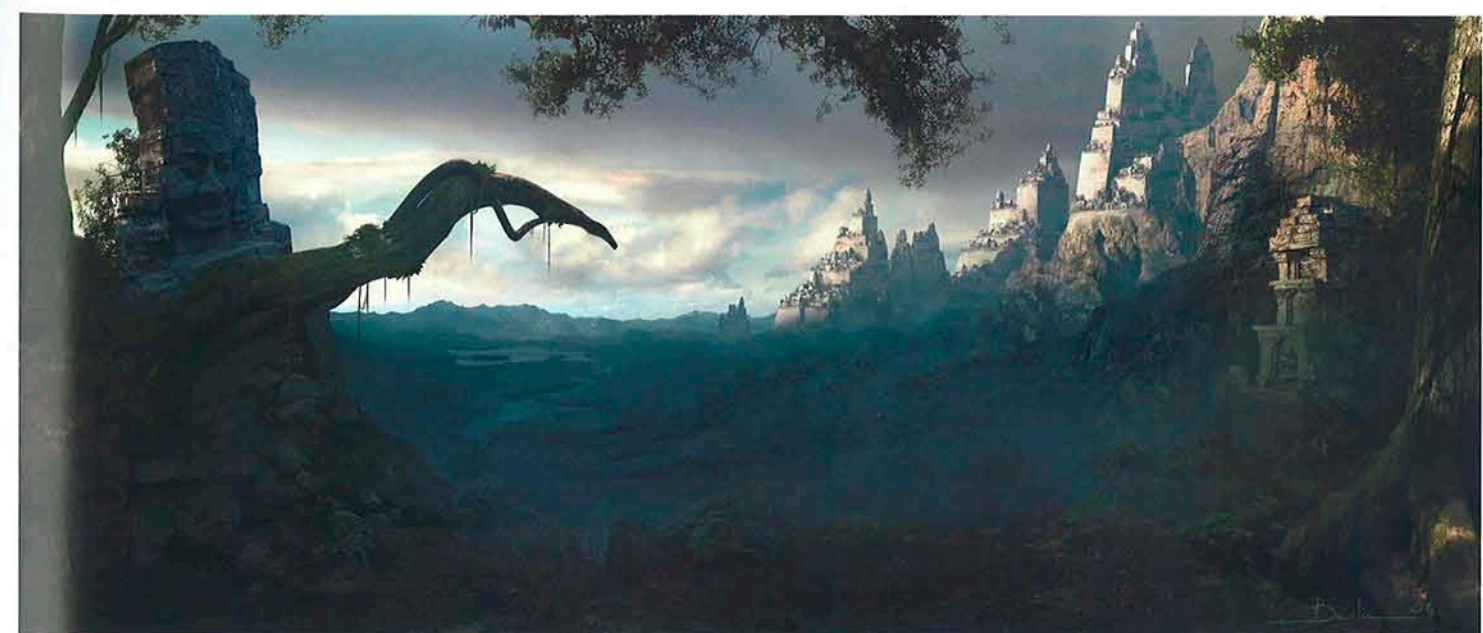


Purgatorium
Photoshop, 3ds max, V-Ray
Dragos Jieanu, PROTV,
ROMANIA
[above]

Dylan Cole
The artist has created a very striking composition with the use of light and dark. Our eye naturally goes towards the bright area in the center with the illuminated architecture. There is an interesting story implied here and that always makes for an intriguing image. I think the illuminated ground fog is used nicely to show depth and to silhouette the figure in the foreground.

Lost Time, Lost Place
Photoshop, Maya
Stephane Belin,
CANADA
[right]

Dylan Cole
I like the lost world feel of this image. The lighting enhances this feel as most of the landscape is shrouded in fog and shadow. The foreground trees and ruins frame the scene nicely and direct our eye to the light catching the tops of the architecture. I also enjoy the color and texture variation in the shadow areas.





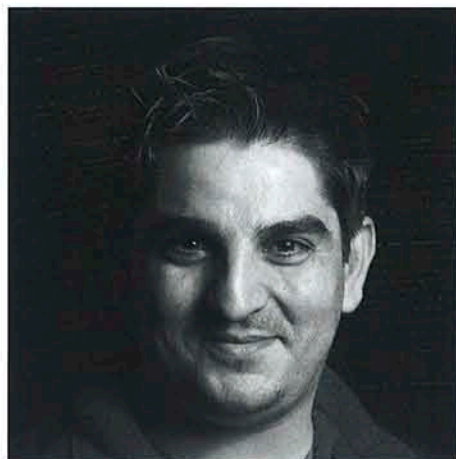
Gothic Castle
Photoshop
Steven Messing,
USA

Dylan Cole
I think the composition is very effective in the piece. The foreground trees lead us into the painting nicely and draw us to the cathedral fortress. I think the use of atmosphere and ground fog is very good. The repetition of the gravestones is a great tool to establish distance and scale. A very well-executed night shot.



Silent Evening
Photoshop, 3ds max
Audrius Urbonavicius,
LITHUANIA

Dylan Cole
I like the understated realism of this piece. The palette is pretty without calling too much attention to itself. The composition is very effective with the bank leading our eye into the image and the trees silhouetted against the bright sky. The foreground river bank and trees recall the paintings of the Hudson River School, one of my favorite group of artists.



ALP ALTINER

Alp Altiner's career as an artist started in Seattle where he grew up, working in print design for magazines, and multimedia projects. As a comic book artist, he worked for publishers such as Todd McFarlane, Image Comics, Top Cow Productions, DC and Marvel. He then worked as a conceptual artist for video game developers in both traditional and digital visual development. After receiving an offer from Digital Domain, he joined their Visual FX Studio in Venice California as a matte painter/concept artist. Since then, he has been working for film/tv and video game developers as a VFX artist specializing in 2D and 3D related visual FX work, including concept design, matte paintings, 3D modeling, texturing, and lighting.



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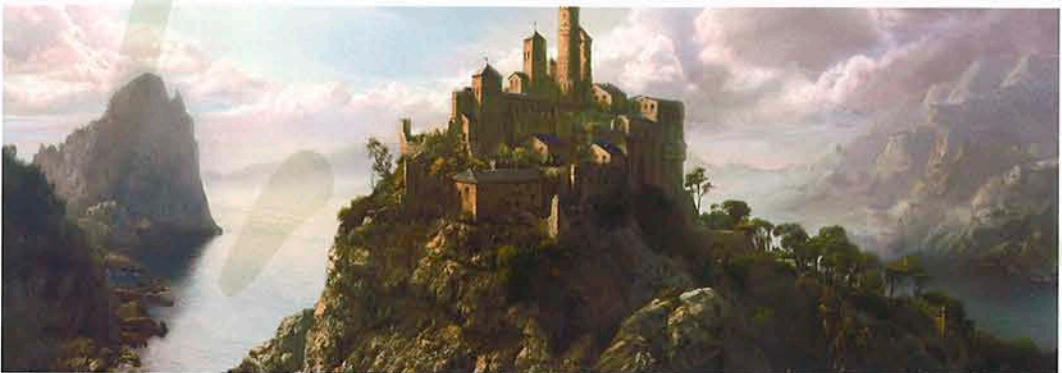
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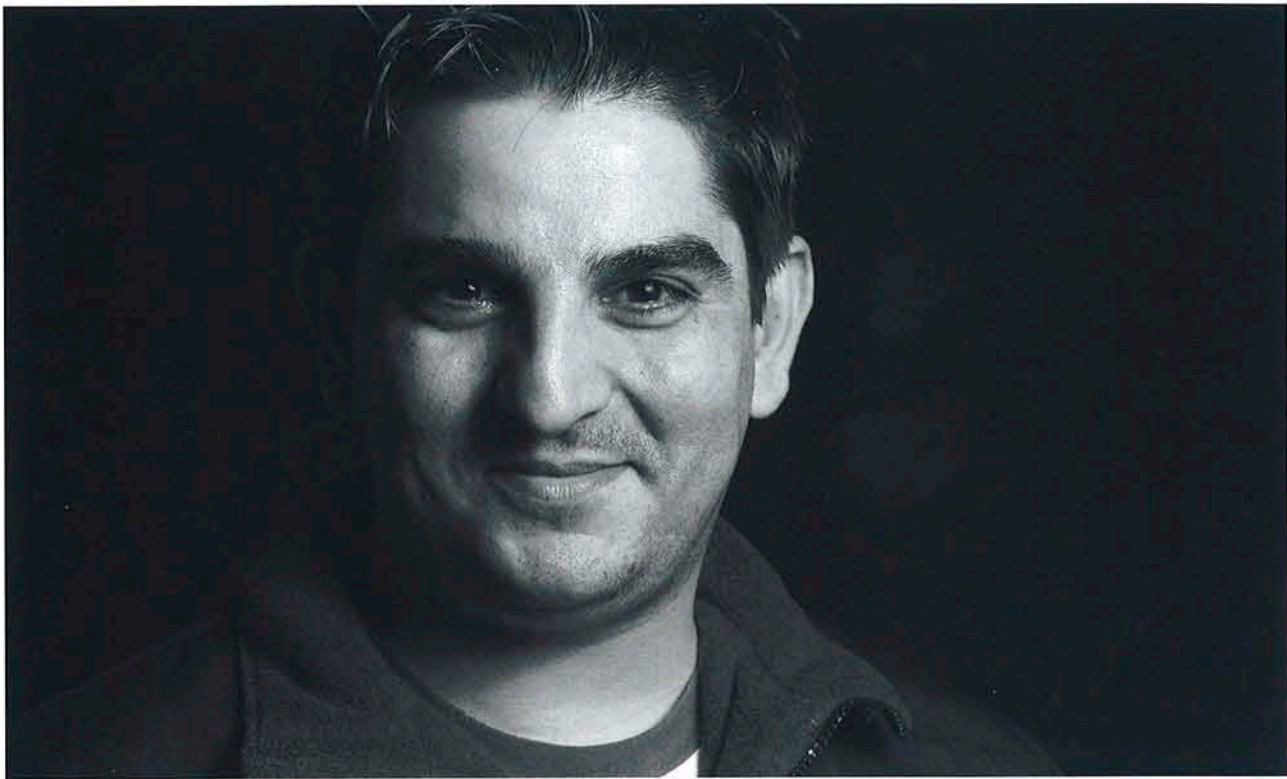
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ALP ALTINER: THE ARTIST



Background

I started drawing at a very early age. My parents are both artists, and were very supportive and bought me various art, and how-to-draw type books while growing up. My dad got me an issue of Spiderman when I was around eleven—that's when things really changed, and I knew I wanted to make a living as an artist some day. Their support helped me tremendously, and I never stopped drawing and painting ever since. I studied print design, and multimedia at the Art Institute for a short time back home in Seattle where I grew up, and my first professional assignment was in print design for a local newspaper, which was a freelance job, designing the cover, and various interior illustrations. I continued working in print for a while, and eventually made the switch into multimedia, since my main interest has always been in sound, and motion-related creations. Several other projects eventually led to more and more web design and Flash animation jobs.

After multimedia studies I started using computers for all my projects, and continued learning as many programs as possible, and also got into learning certain languages such as dhtml, java, asp, and jsp while working for a web design firm as their lead web design artist.

Comics and games

I started working in After Effects, and was able to translate my vision both in design and sound in the creation of motion graphics work. At the same time I started getting video game conceptual design work, and my first concept designs were several years ago for Monolith Productions, a video game developer in Seattle. My passion and love for comics led me to take a break from the digital media for a while, and when I started getting professional work in comics, I worked in that field for couple of years for publishers such as Todd Mc Farlane, DC, Marvel, Top Cow Productions, and

many others. I learned a tremendous amount of traditional skills while working in comics from some of the best artists, such as Todd Mc Farlane, Marc Silvestri, Jim Valentino, and various others, which today is helping me with my daily work in conceptual design, not only environments, but characters, general drawing and sketching skills. Besides, penciling, and inking, my very first digital work also was done while working in comics, which was the coloring of comic book pages using Photoshop. After comics, going back into the digital field and being introduced to the Wacom tablet was the time I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life—draw and paint for a living. I started getting heavy work in the video game field as a concept artist, and started digitally painting on a daily basis. After learning more and more about matte paintings through the Internet, books, and movies, I decided to quit my day job and take some time off to put a portfolio together.



Hidden Lords: A matte painting of a valley at dusk with a gothic structure in the foreground.

I sacrificed many months to stay at home to work on my demo reel. After gathering together some new paintings, I sent my demo reel to various studios, and shortly after was offered a matte painting job at Digital Domain.

Digital tools

In the past I've used programs such as Photoshop, After Effects, Illustrator, Flash, Director, and others while working as a multimedia artist but never had any 3D software training/experience. When I started working in film and was surrounded by unbelievably talented 3D artists, I started showing more interest in CG, and eventually got into it. My very first CG work was building 3D models, and creating textures for the film 'Van Helsing'. I currently use Photoshop,

Painter, Maya, ZBrush, Shake, and After Effects for my visual fx work. Mostly Photoshop and Painter for conceptual design work/2D matte paintings, and Maya for all my modeling, texturing, lighting related CG work. I'm also getting into ZBrush for various projects.

On-the-job learning

Syd Dutton offered me a matte painter position to join the team at Illusion Arts, where I did many conceptual and matte paintings for the movie 'Van Helsing', as well as other projects. I was introduced for the first time to many original oil paintings done on glass, and it was the most unbelievable feeling seeing these giant paintings done in oils by some of the best painters such as Al Whitlock, Mr. Dutton himself, Rob Stromberg, and Bob Scifo.

Believe me, it makes a huge difference seeing these original paintings in person. While working at Illusion Arts, Syd Dutton taught me the thinking process behind painting photo-realistically, and how to create the illusion of reality both digitally as well as in traditional oil paintings. He also shared many traditional painting techniques, and how to capture things in the world with a matte painter's eye. I soon after started painting in oils on my lunch breaks, and my passion for matte paintings grew limitless, and I was hungry to learn more, and more. The painting skill certainly grows with how hard you work, and how much time you invest in practicing and studying in your free time. Eventually I got more involved in CG in general, and started doing various 3D matte paintings, which required me to build various 3D

models, and create projections myself to be mapped onto 3D for complicated camera moves. With 2D projections in 3D I've learned many shortcuts and great techniques while working in film productions.

Using reference

The biggest lesson I've learned is to use reference before starting to assemble a matte painting. Matte paintings require photo-realism, and seamless integration with a particular scene you work with. It is achieved by integrating photos and/or CG elements, and blending them together. While creating this type of work, you will most of the time freehand paint on top of certain areas to add textures, and other real-life fundamentals. This will vary upon each project. The only time I got to entirely freehand paint



New Japan: A matte painting that contrasts traditional Japanese architecture with a city of the future.

certain things was for the film 'Van Helsing' where I purely used my painting skill for a couple of matte paintings to add certain parts of the environments.

Working for Hollywood

I really enjoyed working on the 'Exorcist' movie, where I started getting heavily into the use of 3D, and 2D projections. One of the shots I worked on required us to remove a female actress from the scene with a very low, and close-up camera pulling back. It was the most challenging shot I've worked on, and eventually various matte paintings were projected onto 3D terrains, and the result was great. I also had to figure out a way to integrate an actor into the same scene, which also was achieved with complex projection techniques without having to texture a CG

character. A matte painter's job will vary depending on the shot and requirements, so sometimes you will create other elements, such as textures, overlay paintings, and other 2D techniques to complete a shot. Each project requires different skills, and ways to finalize the sequence.

Getting into the industry

You can try e-mailing certain matte painters you like and ask for their opinions and to critique your work. Study light, shadow, and perspective intensively and paint every day. Make it a habit—even if it is a small sketch, idea or a concept. I still do it myself, and try to paint as much as I can in my free time—there is always something new you can and will learn. But you certainly will learn the most in a real production

environment, so maybe you could start as a conceptual artist, and work on a demo-reel, and submit it to various Visual FX studios. Your commitment, and hard work will pay off.

The evolving VFX industry

The work and expectations will become more complex with a lot more VFX shots, unique camera moves and new ways of solving problems. More filmmakers will take advantage of shooting a lot more in green-screen stages and use cost effective solutions such as miniatures and matte paintings. The matte paintings in the future will become more integrated with the newer and creative 3D tools to give even more freedom to directors to limitlessly move around these environments. We certainly will see employment ads in the near future with companies

looking for 3D matte painters with extensive 3D technical skills, experience, and art direction, as well as painting skills, since many CG programs will have more complex, but exciting ways of creating virtual worlds.

The future

Besides working as a matte painter, I also have been working as a 3D artist on various projects for film/TV/commercials, and music videos. I also recently got into character modeling, and study 3D intensively. I consider myself a VFX artist specializing both in 2D and 3D matte paintings, as well as 3D modeling, texturing, lighting, and rendering. My goal is to continue to grow and learn as an artist in general, and learn more about filmmaking and the creation of visual development in motion.



The Journey

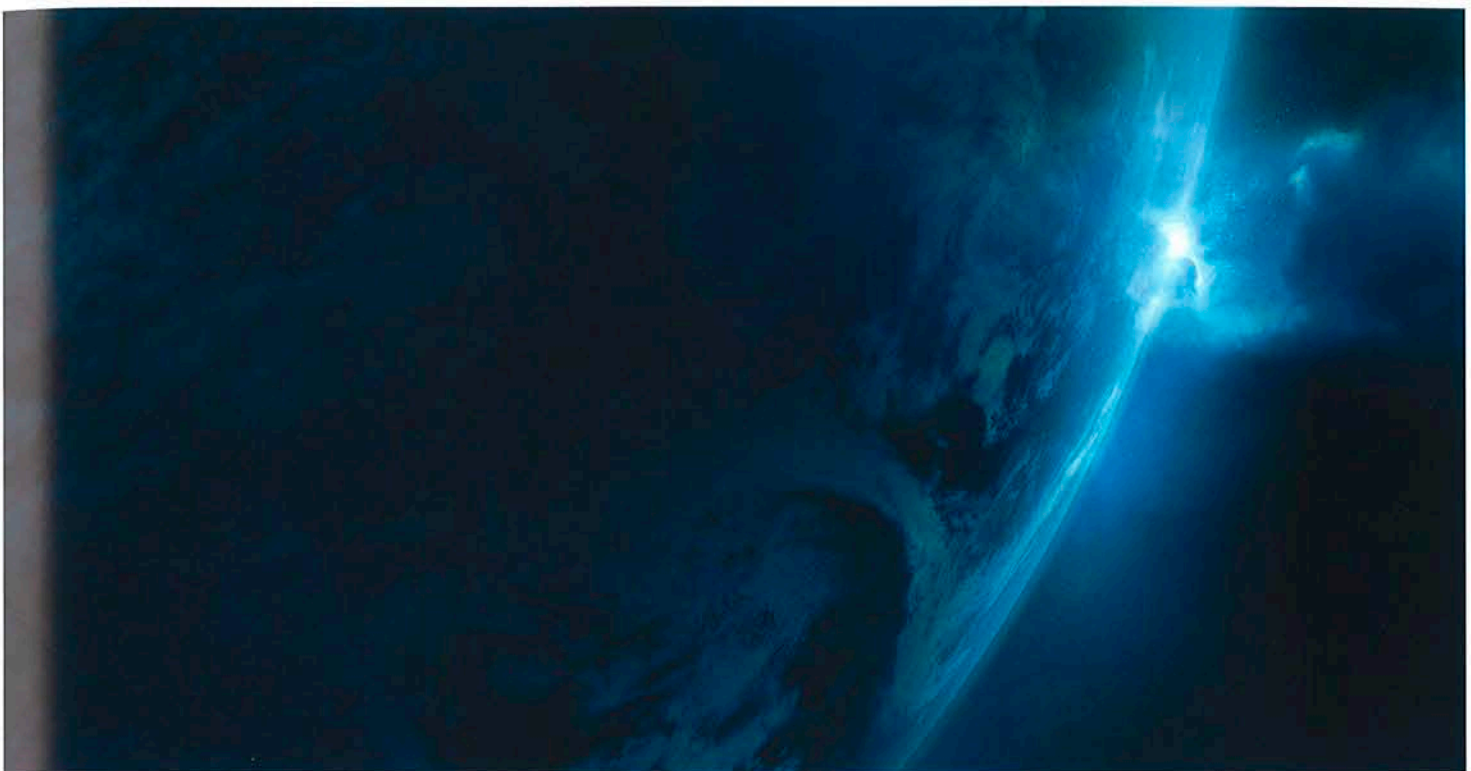
I love jungles, and I wanted to paint something different from all the sci-fi related stuff I've been doing. I remember watching the King Kong movies as a kid, and being amazed by the story so I wanted to translate my own vision

and tell a story with this painting. I tried to integrate the mood, atmosphere, and feelings that I get when looking at a Syd Dutton or Al Whitlock painting.



The Moon of Larda
A painting from my personal project 'The Unknown'. It was very time-consuming to complete this painting as the layout changed several times.
[top]

The Gate
This painting started with some sketches I found in my sketchbook that were done some time ago. I restarted the process with some quick colored paintings in Photoshop.
[above]



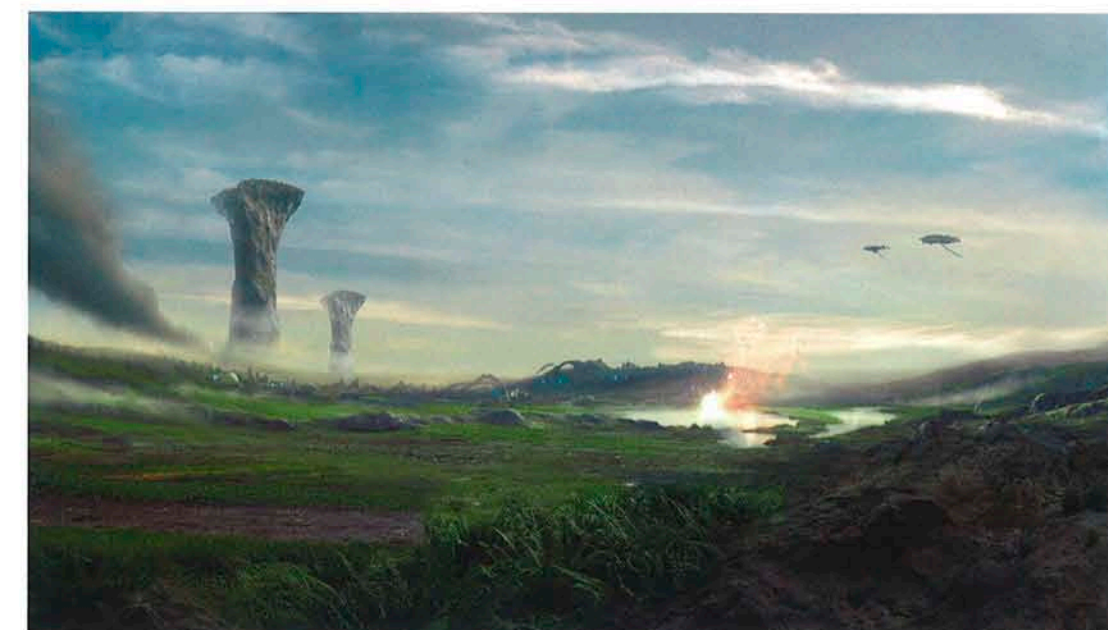
The End
Another painting from 'The Unknown' project. This is part of a 3D matte painting where the planet is surrounded by meteors and various tech that I built in 3D. This painting is the portion that I will project onto geometry adding particle effects for the explosion effect.
[top]

Lost Caves
A painting from 'The Unknown' project. Many sketches I colored went to make up the final concept painting, though this was the final 3D matte painting used in the sequence.
[above]



Evidence

I've wanted to paint a UFO-related piece that took an individual's point of view as though they were taking a photo of it.



Final Word

This is the opening sequence of 'The Unknown' short film. I built most of the vegetation, background trees, and other elements using Paint FX. The water will eventually be animated CG water, along with a lens flare animation while the character is visible next to the small hover vehicle. The planets, sky and rest of the elements are mostly freehand paintings, and a combination of photo elements.

[above]

Final Word

A conceptual painting which I created for the opening sequence of 'The Unknown'.

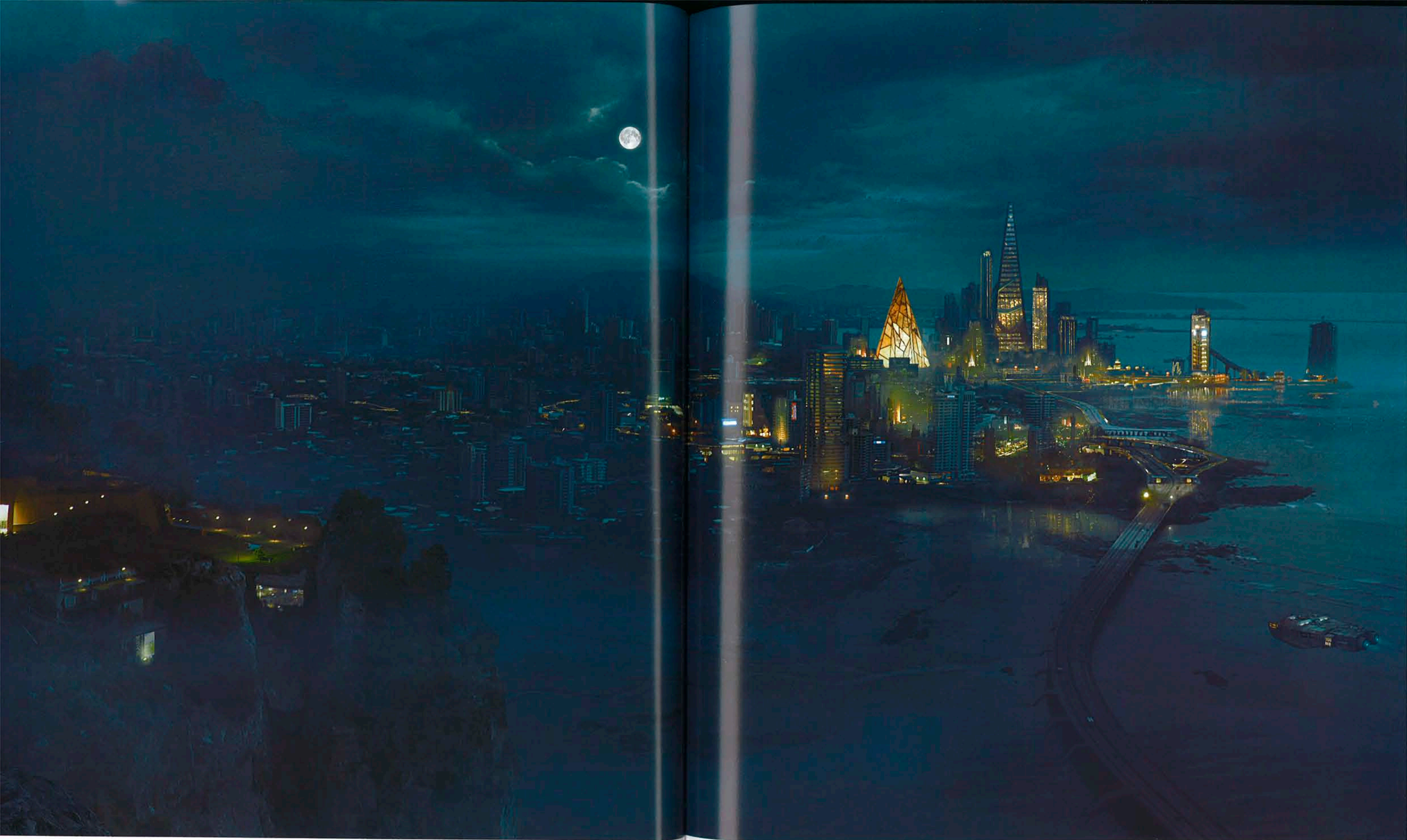
[left]

Last Meeting

A painting from my personal project 'The Unknown'. This painting will eventually become part of a 3D matte painting, and the fog will be a CG element, as a moving layer. I plan to add the beam effect at the compositing stage.

[right]





Arrival

A personal painting of a futuristic city created for the d'artiste Matte Painting book. It started off as a concept sketch, and then evolved into a very detailed painting.



MATTE PAINTING: GOTHIC CATHEDRAL

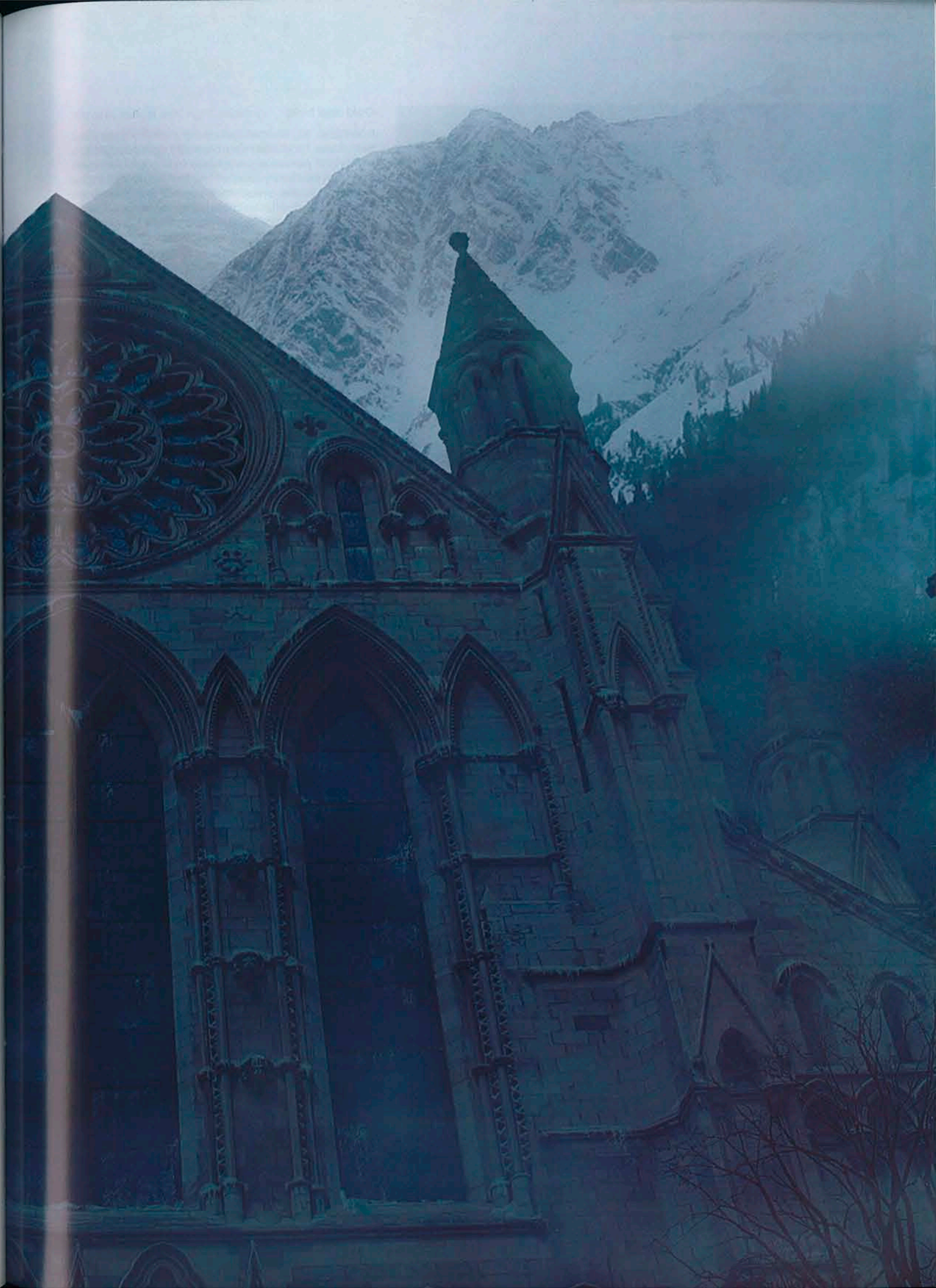
Composition

Composition is really understanding of whether the shapes are interacting, and creating a well-blended image to create a dynamic layout or final image. When I start a painting I usually squint down on it to look at various elements, and/or my sketched layout to see bigger shapes. I judge my arrangement of these elements to lock down the direction, integration, and the balance of the overall layout. With this painting I did arrange my elements/shapes in a H formation, following the photography's layout. I wanted to keep the big shape from the building as my structure, and continue adding elements

such as additional architecture, trees, and various shapes of snow-covered mountains in the background. Since the building is the boldest shape, I wanted to balance it with the faded, and lighter background to keep the heavy shape as the strongest form. I also wanted to indicate movement by adding the birds very softly as an element, introducing motion into the painting. Sometimes you really don't need a confusing arrangement of shapes/elements to get the viewer's attention. I personally always prefer to use a few very dynamic shapes created from essential values, colors and textures.

Technique

My goal is to stay away from spending too much time on a small portion of the painting, since the results will mostly look overworked. Most of the time I will paint a smaller version of the painting in black and white, and/or paint a quick color study without adding too much detail to sharpen my senses, and play with shapes and layout until I feel comfortable working on the actual file. Other times, depending on the subject, I will draw the layout with a pencil, scan in my sketches and quickly paint over them to create my color palette. Not only on the computer, but also traditionally it is very important to have solid drawing skills, and practice traditional skills using various media.



Matte Painting Gothic Cathedral

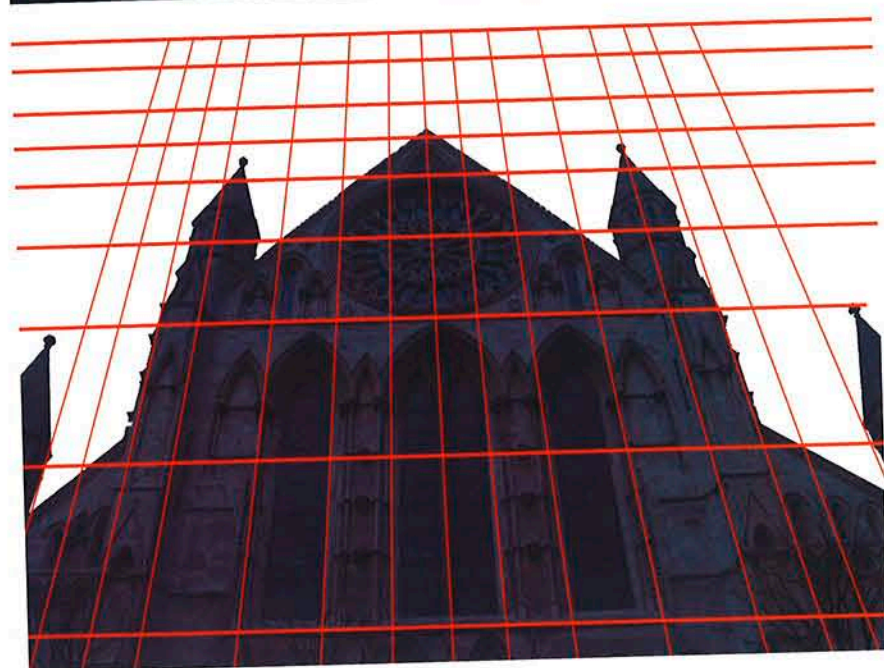
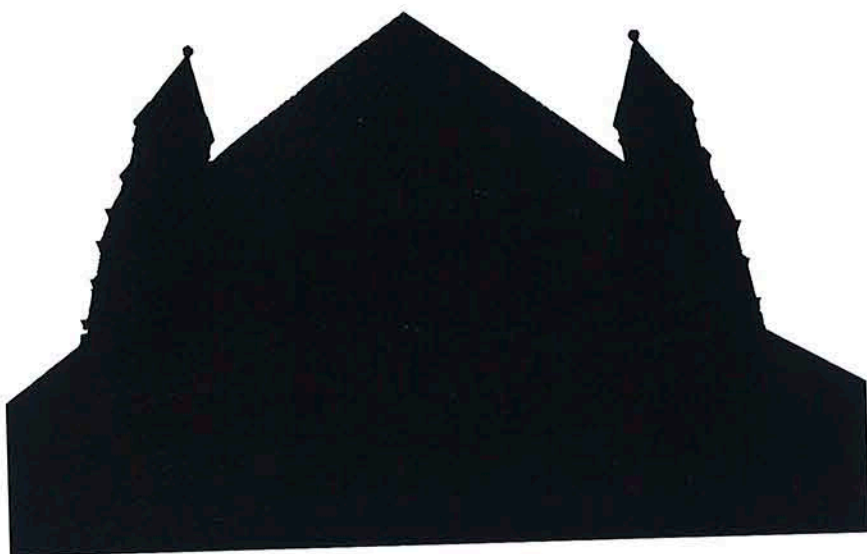


Cold and bold

I wanted to find an interesting photo that had the shape, and bold form I could use to create a painting. I placed the structure in the middle, even though it is usually best not to cut the layout in the middle with the placement of your main element. I wanted to create an interesting scene dominated by a cold bold structure in the middle of nowhere amid a snowy scene.

Calculations

I wanted to pull a matte from the building, so I did this by using Photoshop's Calculations (Image > Calculations). The bright sky made the process quite easy. I then saved the new channel, and started using Levels to color-correct the image and adjust the saturation. My goal was to get a soft flat tone I could easily work with.



Perspective grid

I adjusted the vanishing point using Perspective (Transform > Perspective) to make it a bit more dramatic and to simulate the look of a smaller lens. I also placed two more towers on the sides of the structure. Using the Path tool, I created a perspective grid of easily visible red lines.

Height, mood and light source

I quickly sketched in a background to get an idea for my layout using the hard round brush. I developed the composition to indicate height, mood, and a light source from behind the furthest mountains. To add motion to the piece, I sketched in some birds and moving atmospheric fog. I also added couple more towers, and indicated some trees.



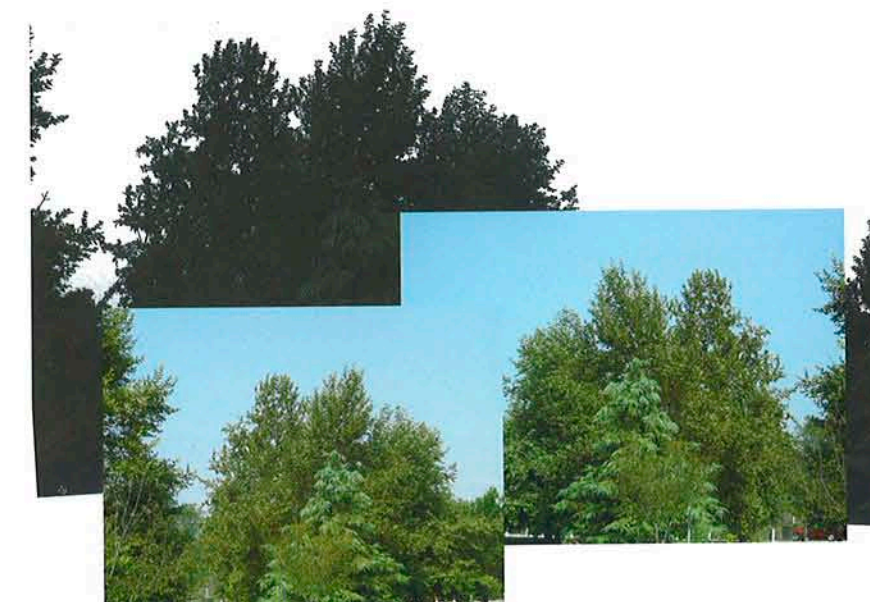
Detail

Using the chalk brush and soft airbrush, I started adding snow to the building. I carefully varied the snow paint so it did not look repeated and had a natural feel. It's really up to the individual how much detail you want to add in. It certainly helps to look at as much reference as possible, and try to use sympathetic colors. I usually paint in more, and then start reducing it until it starts looking more natural. I also will paint at a higher resolution, and then reduce it to the original size, which provides more detail.



Tree reference

I used various tree photos, and started pulling mattes from them using Photoshop's Calculations.





Light and shadow

Building on my first sketch, I started laying in paint, color, and shapes. Using various custom and default brushes, I started laying in some of the mountains, and other background elements. I also used photo reference and sampled some parts from snowy mountains to achieve a photo-realistic effect. The most important part of making your paintings photo-realistic is creating believable light and shadow. Just the right amount of light, shadows, and highlights will bring a photo-realistic feel to your painting. I usually keep all these steps on separate layers, so I can individually dial in my shadows, lights, and highlights layers. I also pulled mattes from several tree images, and after saturating, and color-correcting them, I added them into the scene.



Surrounding trees

I added more detail to the mountains, and used a flat tone for the sky, softly airbrushing the far mountains to push them further away. The depth also helped to create the height I wanted to achieve in the scene. I started adding the trees on the right cascading down to lead the viewer's eye more towards the building, and the middle of the scene. I also finalized the placement of all the low-lying trees, to help set a ground level for the scene.



Atmospheric touches

Now I was ready to create my favorite atmospheric layers. I started blending certain areas by airbrushing atmospheric elements, keeping each on separate layers. At this stage I was working with a lot of layers, so I created new layer sets from my linked files, and organized all my separate painting layers, and named them all. It can get pretty crazy if you don't name or colorize your layers. A cool trick that I use is when selecting the move tool 'v' key on your keyboard, if you hold it on a specific area, and right click on the screen it will show you the name of that particular layer. The other thing that really helps me organize everything is colorizing all my linked layers.

Surrounding trees

Now that I had airbrushed various layers to blend certain parts of the painting, I added some of my tree layers. My goal at this point was to push the building forward, and make it look bolder and more solid in the scene. I added more snow to the structure and on some of the branches of the foreground trees. Since some of my reference trees were dry, and had leaves, I wanted to use pine-trees behind the towers to provide bolder shapes and to help blend in the edges of the building. Finally, I added some snow paint on the background trees, and performed further color adjustments on them.



Blending in

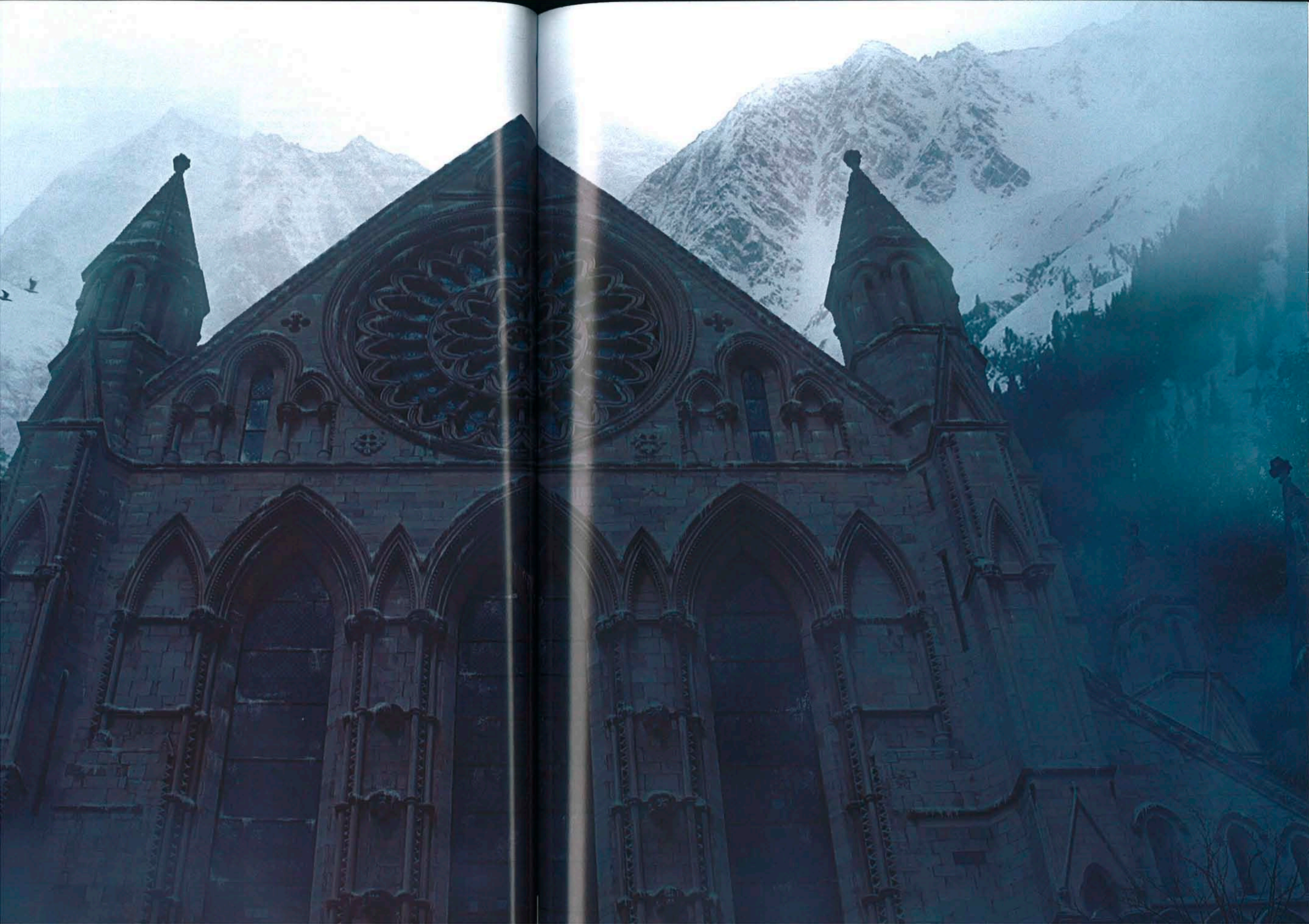
I was getting closer to the final look I was trying to achieve, so I started merging layers to create a lighter file, and saved off a new file. I usually save many versions so I don't have to work on heavy files. I zoomed into the mountain layers, and using a soft airbrush started adding small details onto their surface, indicating the soft light source that I established in my sketch. At this point, I started flipping my image horizontally to look at the way things were blending. I paid particular attention to the amount of atmosphere, and the overall realism of the piece. The most important thing is the way everything blends and sits in the space whether it exists in the real world or a fantasy world.

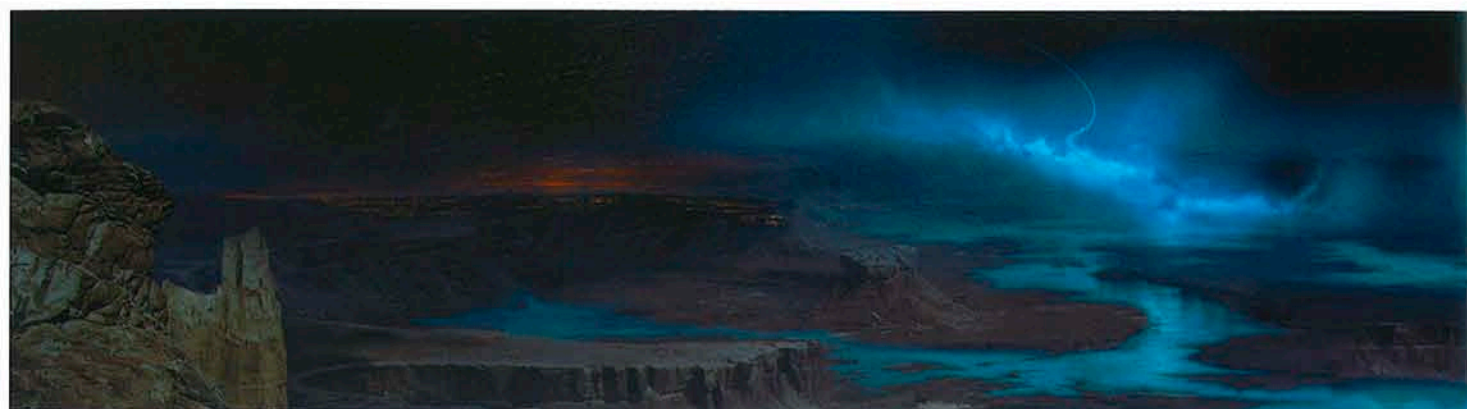


Final touches

My final touches were mostly to add details like birds, and painting more atmosphere into the far mountains to get a good amount of depth. Finally, I strengthened the top light source to draw the viewer's eye to the top edge of the structure, so it would let the eye rest somewhere in the middle again creating the 'H' composition.







MATTE PAINTING: PLANET-SCAPE

Inspiration

I have been wanting to paint a planet scape for a while, and this particular painting for this tutorial started with various pencil sketches I did in my sketchbook on the weekends. Using various shading with a pencil I was simply playing around with shapes, and composition.

Starting point

Eventually, I scanned one of my sketches and started experimenting with values in black and white. My goal is always to create and design a composition to hold the viewer's interest, so I wanted to create an area of tension, and keep a high horizon line, and force the viewer's eye towards the top third of the painting.

Technique

I tried to balance the overall painting by adding calm foreground elements. I also ended up freehand painting as much as I could get away with, and made many custom brushes for various active textures for the surface/ground, and also some smooth ones to have areas for the viewer's eye to rest.





Sketching

I started a colored sketch in Photoshop using the hard round brush and the chalk brush to get an idea for my layout, colors, shapes/form, and composition. I didn't want to spend too much time during this process but wanted to quickly get a fairly readable layout that would indicate the direction I wanted to take. I used the foreground elements/rocks, varying their height and the amount of shadows they're receiving to keep the focal point further back there. I also introduced some of the red/orange tones for the background, and lightly integrated colors into certain areas to create a path to follow the main focal point.

Reference

After I finished my layout, I started gathering as much reference as possible. I started taking pictures more often since I've been working as a matte painter, and it certainly comes in handy having a good personal library of references. You can also purchase stock photos on the Internet from various websites to use for your personal or production-related projects.

Background element

I started laying in the main element for the background piece, and extended the edges by painting. I also used similar photo reference to extend the painting. I do this until I have enough pieces that fill my file, and/or start painting more on top for a certain look of the ground. After I finished my laying down of the background element, I started adjusting the element using Curves and Levels to bring it into the color space I wanted to work with. Using adjustment curves I started painting in lighter and darker areas where I wanted the viewer to focus.

Horizon lighting

I filled in my background with black, and worked more on the lighting and horizon, blending certain areas before I added the stars and additional elements for the space. I also started painting in small lights on certain areas, and at this stage I started experimenting with various freehand painting, adding shape and form.

Foreground

I created my foreground elements using various rocks. Matching my light direction, I started using Curves, and Levels to adjust, tone, color, and paint in my light direction. I also painted a layer of haze in between the foreground rocks and those in front of that layer.

In the color space

I continued to add my foreground elements and kept adjusting until everything was in the same color space. I spent more time making sure that the haze layer in between my foreground layers and background had the right amount of color and opacity.





Atmospheric elements

I started freehand painting some nebula like atmospheric elements, and introduced some colors to create interest and mood. I wanted to create unique layers of star-filled paintings, dust, and atmosphere, and kept playing around with shapes, and color. I also added haze to start creating a well-blended horizon.



Movement

Using a soft airbrush I started painting more around the focal point driving the eye closer, and painting in some wave formations to create motion. I always try to do this, as if something is moving or has the sense of motion in my paintings, which helps me tell a story, and create a certain mood. I also created another layer at this stage for the star fields by using noise, and using Linear Dodge blend mode for several star field layers. I varied their size and opacity, and created layer sets for various parts of the painting.



Water

At this stage I started painting in the water using a round hard brush indicating areas I wanted to be visible.

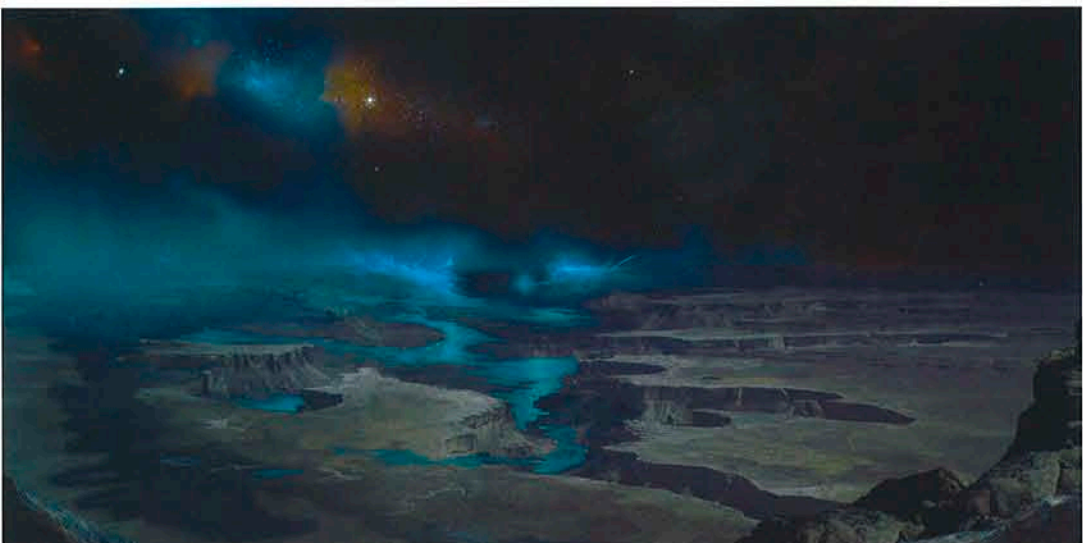
Balancing detail

At very low opacity I continued airbrushing all the blue smoke/atmosphere, and started flipping the image horizontally, taking a break from painting, and analyzing the work so far. I started turning certain layers on and off to see how well everything was balanced. I didn't want to overwork and try to decide on the amount of blue I wanted in the mid area. It is really easy to miss certain parts you paint, that may not blend with the rest of the work, so it's helpful to go back to your sketch and see how much detail was introduced. I added brighter touches of paint in the focal point area, and started adding very small and fine detail to give more density and realism to the ground and water.



Learning from the past

I continued working on balancing my black values in the foreground elements so they received enough lighting to integrate with the rest of the painting. I used several rock images that I balanced, and played with height and shape to make a final decision. I started airbrushing atmosphere behind this layer to separate the hint of secondary rock elements for the midground. I wanted to keep the shadows a bit stronger on the surface closer to the opening, so it would help create a motion for the viewer's eye and use the bold black star-field area for them to rest. I've learned most of these rules and techniques by studying traditional oil painters, and practicing in painting with oils.



Final details

Lastly I got into the finer detail, such as my secondary color choice, and started painting the fire/smoke in the background, and used a chalk brush again to get more texture into the vibrant tones of colors. I also decided on how much of the colorful background elements should be visible for the final image by erasing most of the extra elements I had painted in. Lastly, I created a Curve adjustment on top of all my layers and balanced and color-corrected the final image.







MATTE PAINTING: THE BIRTH

Inspiration

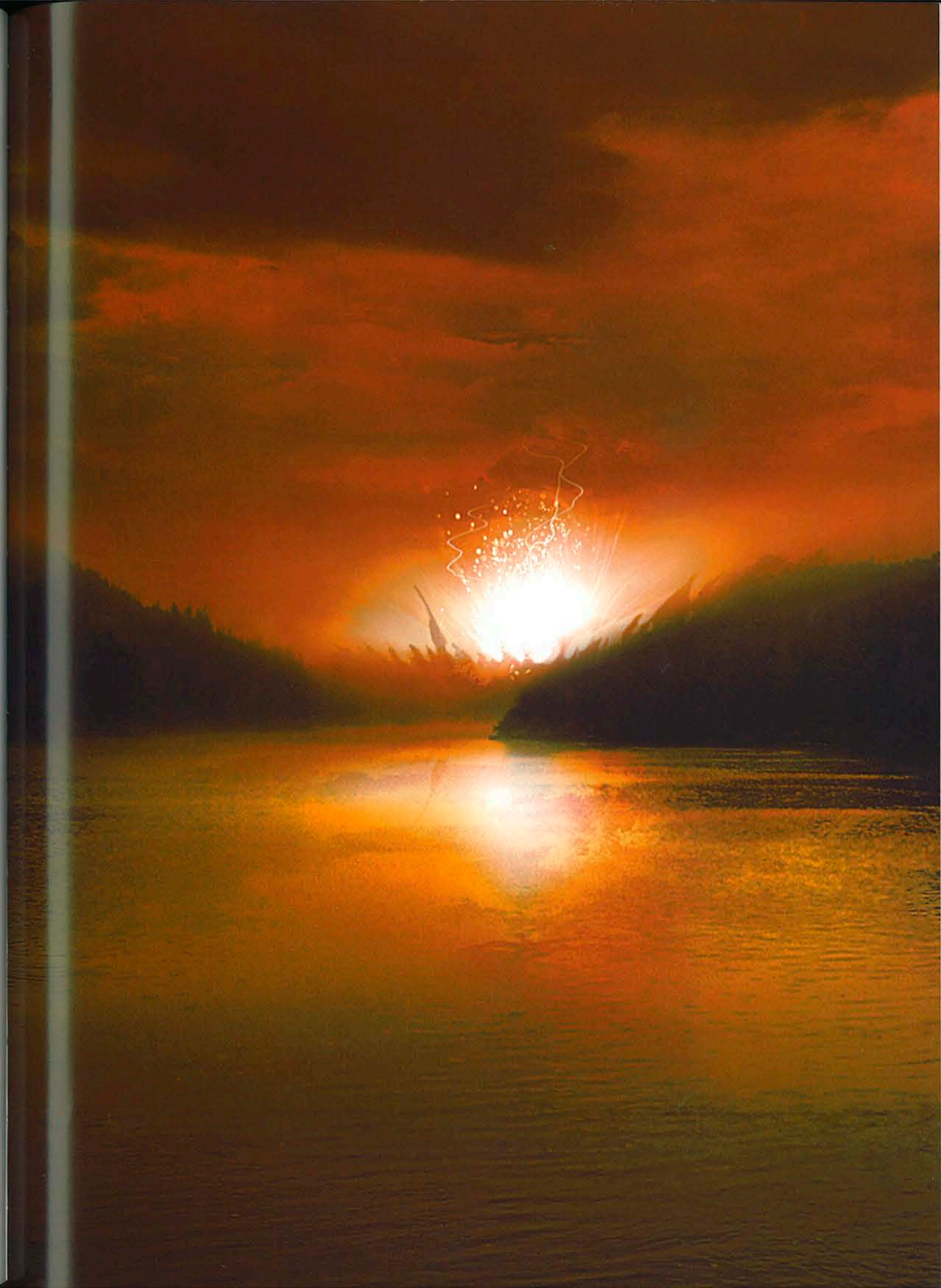
Like many others, I really enjoyed the look and feel of the movie 'Chronicles of Riddick'. It featured a lot of really unique and creative environments and helped to bring the story to life. It inspired me to create a painting which centered around a strange light source to create an other-worldly moody ambience.

Technique

Using a photograph with some atmospheric elements already there, I planned to colorize it to give some character and mood. My main goal was to freehand paint a sky and additional glow/wave-like effects on top of my main light source. I didn't want too much reflection affecting the painting, instead letting the light do the visual work.

Composition

I wanted to use a 'V'-shaped composition, to bring the viewer's eye to the light source. Sometimes you don't need a lot of detail if your painting needs to be strong, moody and atmospheric. I usually add detail where the main light source is. I wanted to add some interesting shapes, and hide the rest of the visible forms to create a bold image.





Starting with a good photo

I started with an image that had a great composition, and I wanted to add even more mood and color. My aim was to use a simple approach by adding some painted clouds, and a light source. I also wanted to share some techniques on creating some of the elements in this painting.



The right red

I started with color-corrections using Curves and dialing into the channels to get the red I was looking for. I wanted to keep this tone throughout the painting. Using a soft airbrush I brushed the midground and the right edge to create some interest points. I added some more fog and atmosphere using the same brush, and set some of the layers to Screen blend mode.

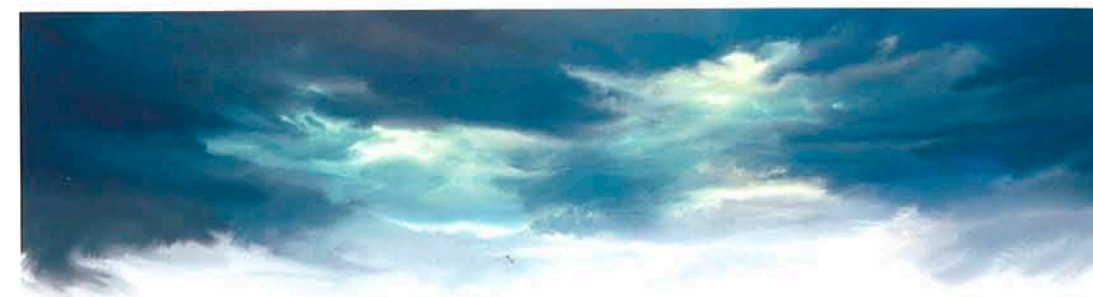


Light source

I painted some shapes in the background, introduced an odd light source, and created a new layer for some waves. For the wave lines, I created a straight line then used the Distort/Wave filter with varied settings to get interesting shapes. I added a bit of a glow to these layers and merged them into a layer set with a Screen blend mode.

Cloud shapes and direction

For the clouds I started adding various layers and painted in some tones using the airbrush. I made some shapes to decide on a direction for the clouds using the Smudge tool. I then started pushing and pulling various parts and colors to create interesting shapes for my top sky.



Reflections

I wanted to lightly integrate some cloud reflection into the water, but did not plan on making it too visible. Using the same brushes and the Smudge tool I started carving enough shapes to add this layer on top of my reflections. It is always a good idea to use reference for skies, but it is fun painting freehand for these type of paintings. When I was done I set the layer to Screen mode, and using levels punched it up enough to be visible.



Touch-ups

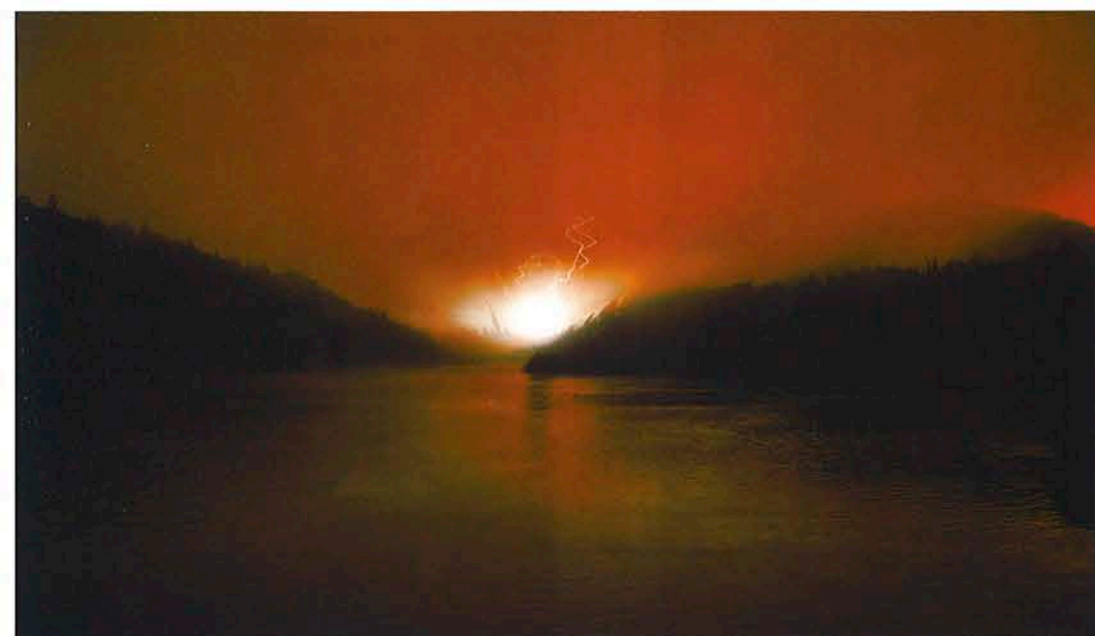
I added a sky layer using the Multiply blend mode and adjusted the layer using Curves and Levels. I also created a new layer, and started touching things up by freehand painting a little information here and there.





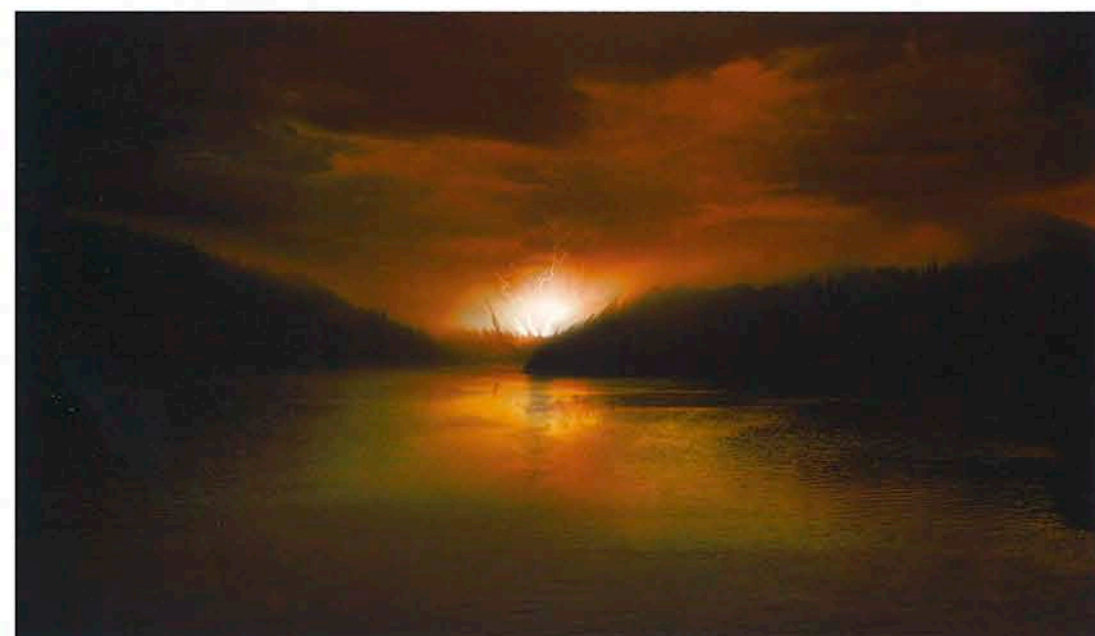
Wavy shapes

At this stage I experimented some more with wavy shapes for the light source area and spent time with the placement of various wave light effects.



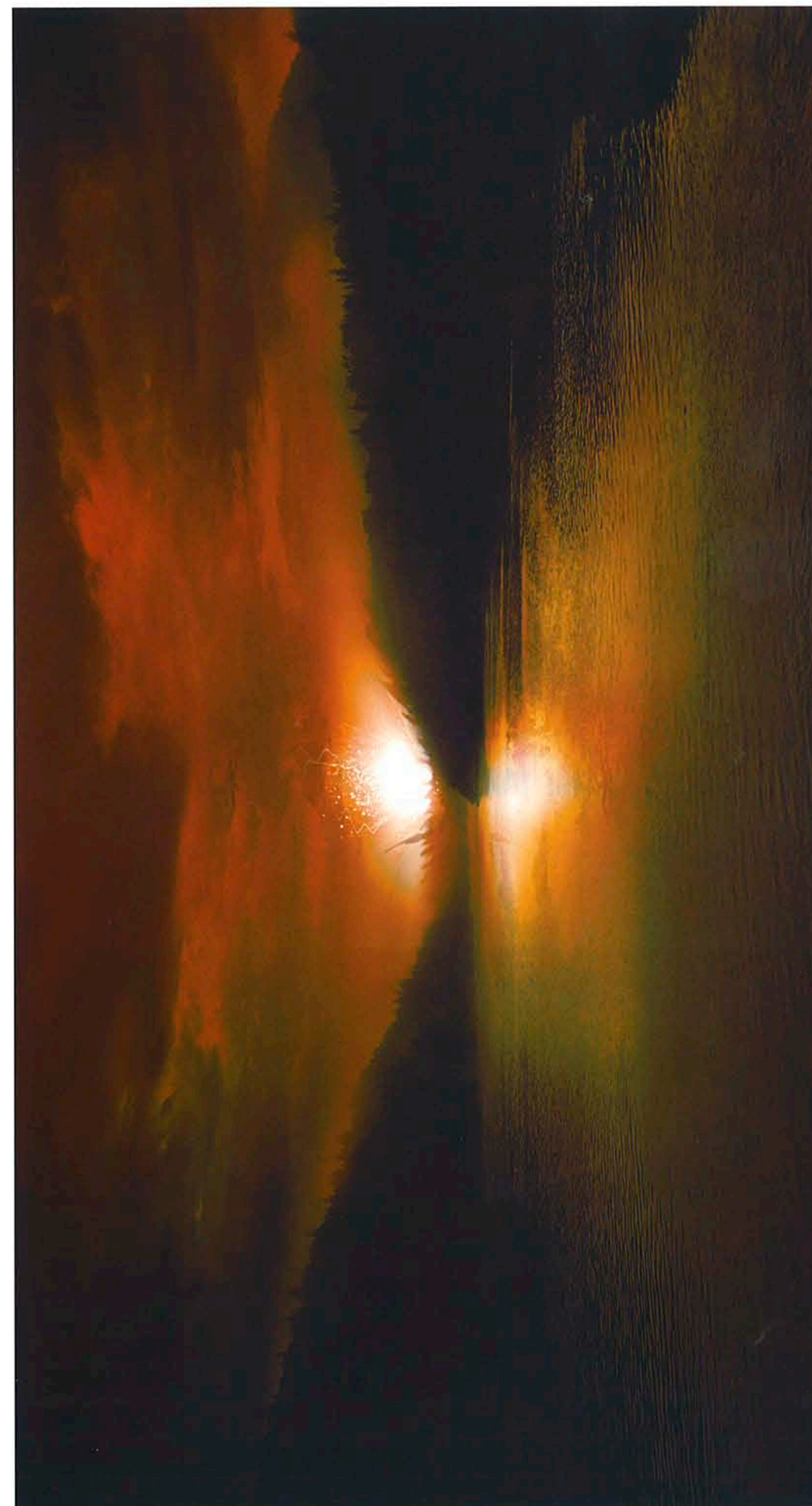
More reflections

I wanted this painting to look simple, yet very moody, and dark, so I started thinking about how much reflection to integrate into the water, and again started sketching on a new layer to see my options.



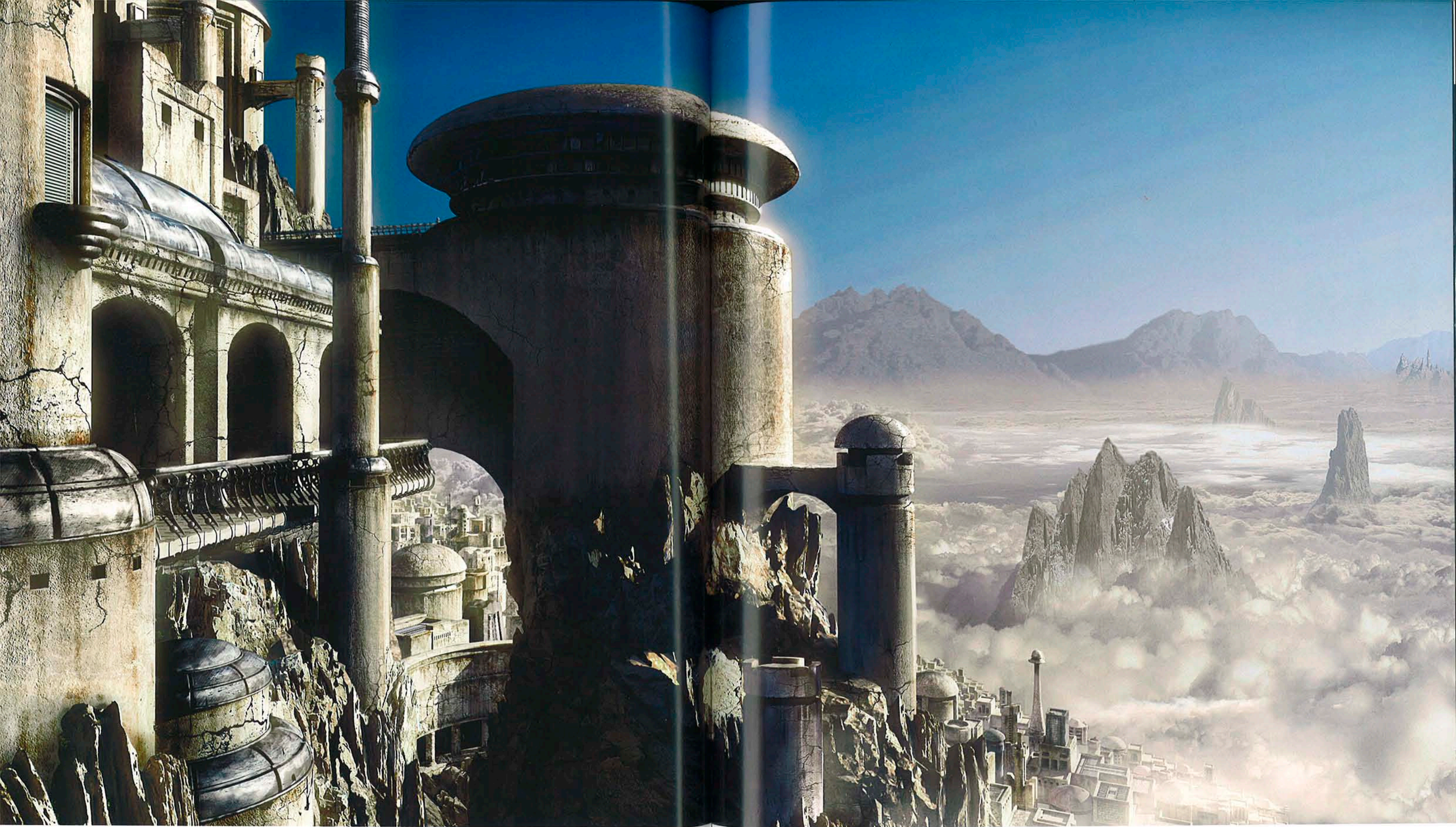
Leading the eye

Now I had both of my painted cloud layers on and using the Dodge tool I started touching up these layers a little with a soft airbrush, and added more glow for the light-source. I painted the edges of the trees to add more details that would lead the eye closer to the mid ground.



Finishing up

This is the final step where I only wanted to Dodge certain areas, such as the water, reflections, and the light-source. Sometimes it works best to do the most minimal painting, and concentrate on color-correction, and blending additional elements on top of the main layout.



Cloud City
Photoshop, 3ds max
Jaime Jasso, METACUBE
MEXICO

Alp Altiner
A very cool image. When using such strong foreground elements, sometimes it helps to fade out some of the elements in the furthest distance. Great image.



Dark City
Photoshop
Sarry Long,
FRANCE
[top]

Alp Altiner
I love this creative image. I am really into moody paintings. The skulls make this image stand out among the many similar works. This image has a great focal point. Well executed.

Castle at Night
Photoshop
Mogens Skjold Overbeck,
UNITED KINGDOM
[above]

Alp Altiner
Another great castle painting, and a very interesting sky. The artist integrated the lights really well, and he also created a nice focal point in this illustration.

Runelords, Mystarria - Castle
Photoshop
Jiri Stamfest, UPP,
CZECH REPUBLIC
[right]

Alp Altiner
Interesting image/concept. It certainly would be ok to add more highlights to certain areas from the sun, and also more atmosphere as we get higher, to help with scale. Very nice approach.





Castle Dracula
Photoshop
Brenton Cottman,
USA

Alp Altiner
Very creative, unique layout. I like
Brenton's use of shapes and form.
Hey, maybe this place really does exist
somewhere.





Beyond the End of Cloudland
Photoshop
Tao Mu,
CHINA
[above]

Alp Altiner
I like the stylized quality of this—looks like something out of a Disney movie. The light rays help make this a very powerful image. Also the composition is really nice, and I really like the foreground rocks that help with depth and scale.



Approaching the Lost City
Photoshop
Mogens Skjold Overbeck,
UNITED KINGDOM
[right]

Alp Altiner
Very nice image/illustration. I like the sky, and all the elements, making this a very interesting digital work.





Glacier Base
 Photoshop, 3ds max
Jaime Jasso, METACUBE
 MEXICO

Alp Altiner
 Very unique image. I like the integration of the CG elements; it certainly makes this image stand out. I think it would have helped toning down the blues in the shadows of the icebergs to blend it with the rest of the image. Well done!

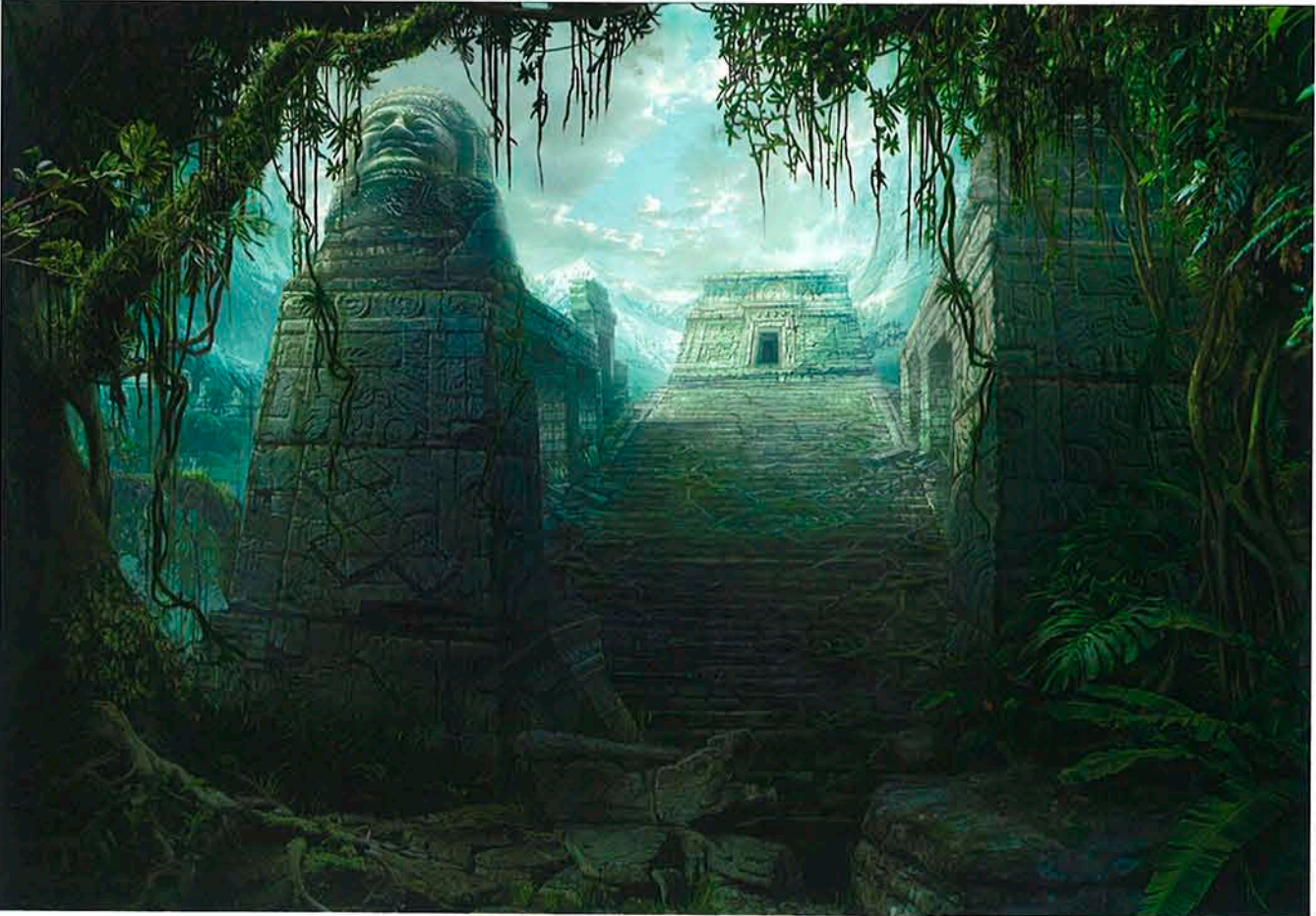


Leaky House
Photoshop, Painter
D. Wilson, G. Smith



Dubrovnik Matte Painting
Photoshop
Patrick Jensen,
USA

Alp Altiner
This painting has a very cool style. Some areas look like they are from a concept painting, and there are some realistic elements. I really like the water reflections on this image.



Sunset memory
Photoshop, inferno
Justin van der Lek,
THE NETHERLANDS
[top]

Alp Altiner
Very well done. Certainly has the feel, as if it is a scene from a movie. Love how well the light and shadow is integrated, which is the most challenging part about photo-real matte paintings.

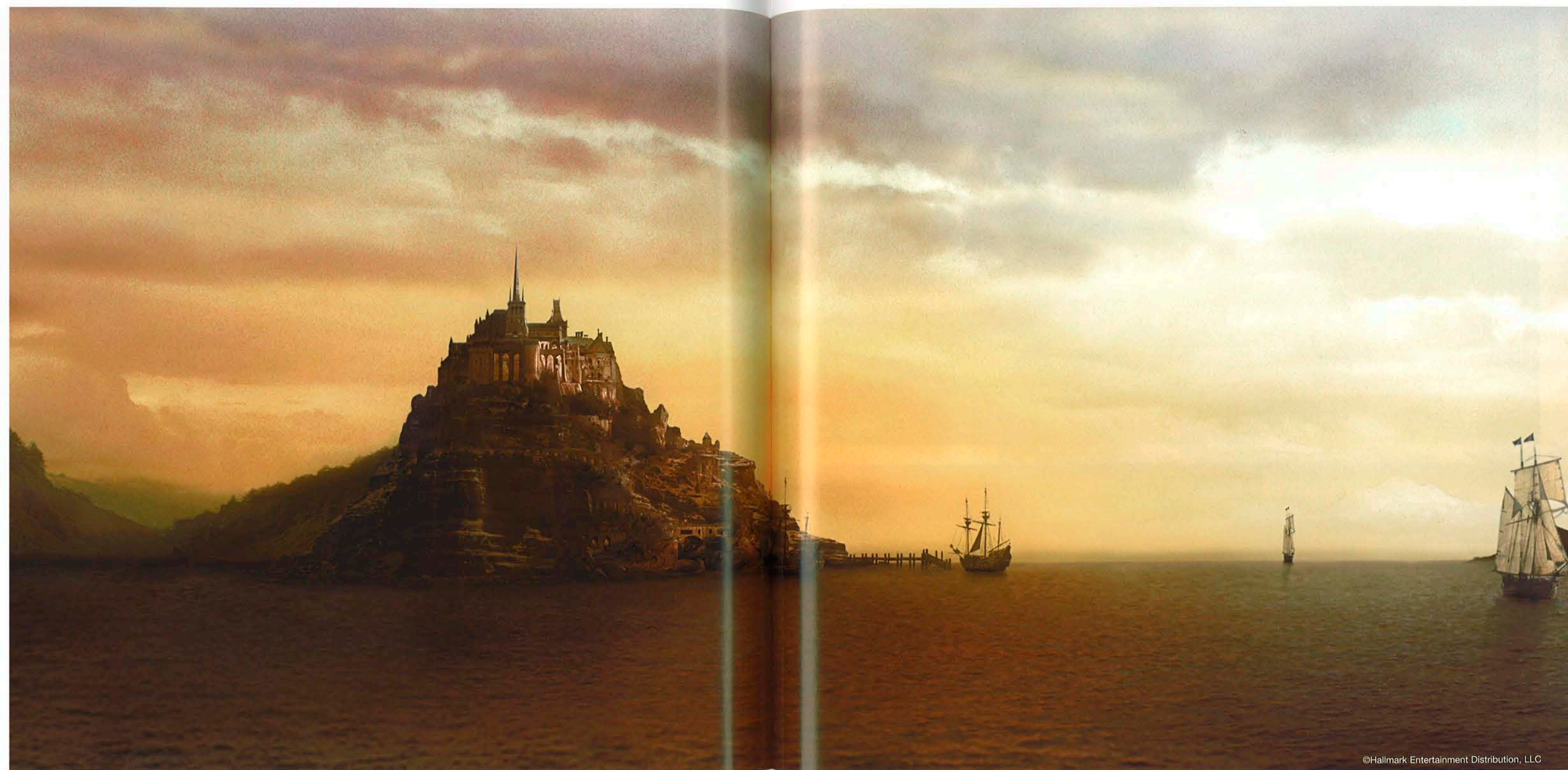
Ancient Voices
Photoshop
Dana Daukshta, F. Rice
LATVIA
[above]

Alp Altiner
Nice composition, and great colors. I really like how it feels as though you are looking through the branches and leaves.

Fauno's Hideaway
Photoshop, CINEMA 4D
Charles Piles,
SPAIN
[right]

Alp Altiner
This is really beautiful, extremely creative, and well done. This image certainly speaks for itself! Very good use of lighting.





©Hallmark Entertainment Distribution, LLC

WARTHSEA
Photoshop
Copyright Hallmark Entertainment
Distribution, LLC
Isoul Shafeazadeh,
NADA

Alp Altiner
This reminds me of some of the
traditional paintings of the Hudson
River—especially of Albert Bierstadt's
work. The sky is very well done, and
really like that little green patch in
the far background on the left. This
is a great image, with the traditional/
modern quality.



Sarah 3
Photoshop
Client: WANDA
Sarry Long,
FRANCE
[left]

Alp Altiner
Very good integration of photography, and color balancing. It feels like a scene from a sci-fi film. The only thing I've noticed is the scale of the girl, compared to the truck behind her. Other than that, I love this overall image.

Dark City Towers
Photoshop
Mogens Skjold Overbeck,
UNITED KINGDOM
[right]

Alp Altiner
Very powerful image. I really like the birds that the artist has added, and his lighting is superb. It certainly stands out from the crowd.



Sarah 1
Photoshop
Client: WANDA
Sarry Long,
FRANCE
[left]

Alp Altiner
Another great view from the same area. It feels as though the girl was photographed with a smaller lens, compared to the background, which creates an entirely different scale. I really like the overall execution of the work.





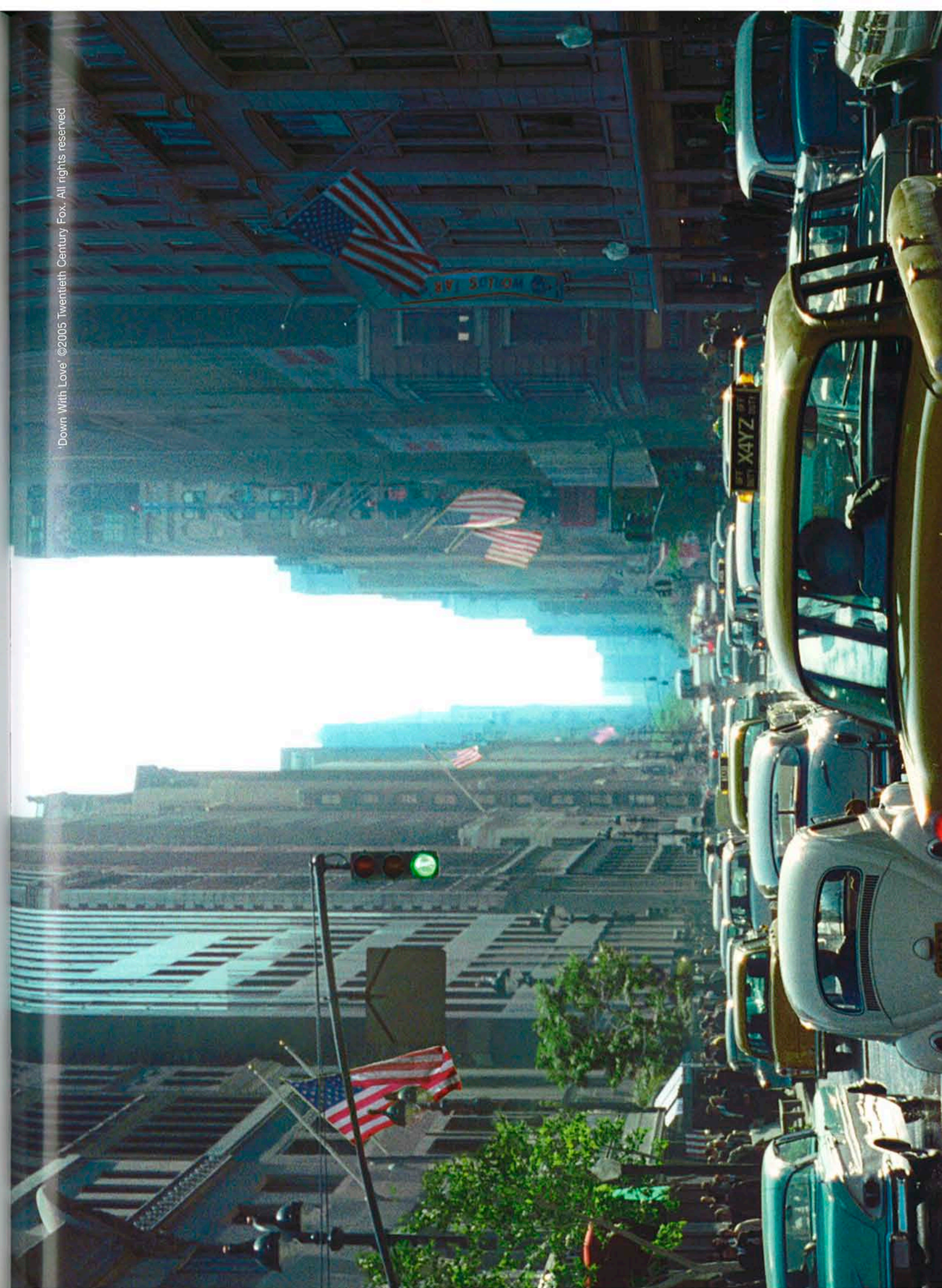
Arena in the Dusk
Maya, mental ray, 3ds max
Sébastien Larroudé, Ubisoft
CANADA

Alp Altiner
Another image that speaks for itself.
I like how Sébastien shows motion
with the flags. Every little creative
element brings valuable results to such
a great painting.

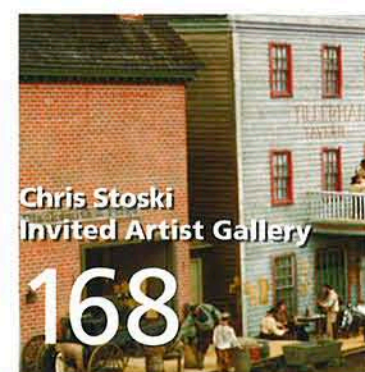
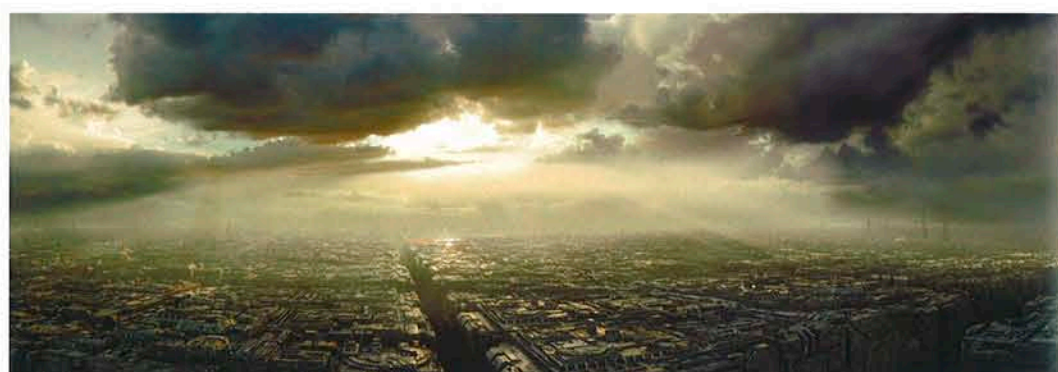
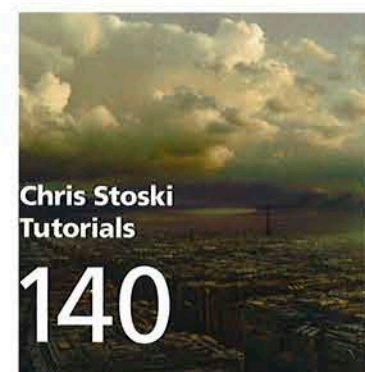
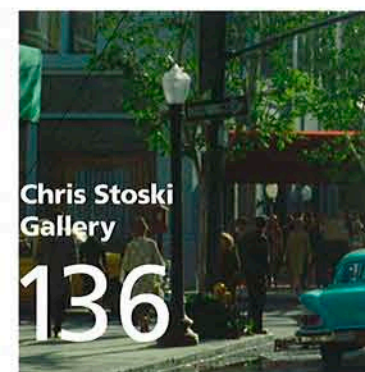


CHRIS STOSKI

Chris Stoski has always had an interest in environment creation and design. He graduated from the School of Architecture at Washington State University with both a Bachelor of Architecture and a Bachelor of Science in Architecture and found a passion for computer graphic artwork through creating CG architectural renderings and computer animation classes. He moved into the film industry becoming the lead full-time Digital Matte Artist at Matte World Digital while also performing the duties of the in-house concept artist and art director. He began working as a Digital Matte Artist for Industrial Light and Magic where he has spent time working on 'Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith'.



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Background

As a kid I liked to draw a great deal. In Junior High School I took many art classes and in the ninth grade a Drafting class introduced me to the world of architecture. I always knew I wanted to have a job where I could be creative. Since I was 13, I wanted to be an Architect. I grew up in Canada and after graduating from High School I went to Washington State University and earned two degrees in Architecture. I see Architecture school more as a design school. In college I not only learned about building, but about good design, aesthetics and creating environments.

Commodore 64

My first experience with a computer was with my Commodore 64 when I was about 9 years old. I used it for games, but the first (and I think only) artwork I created with it was a grid of sprites designed to represent the Space Shuttle. It wasn't until college

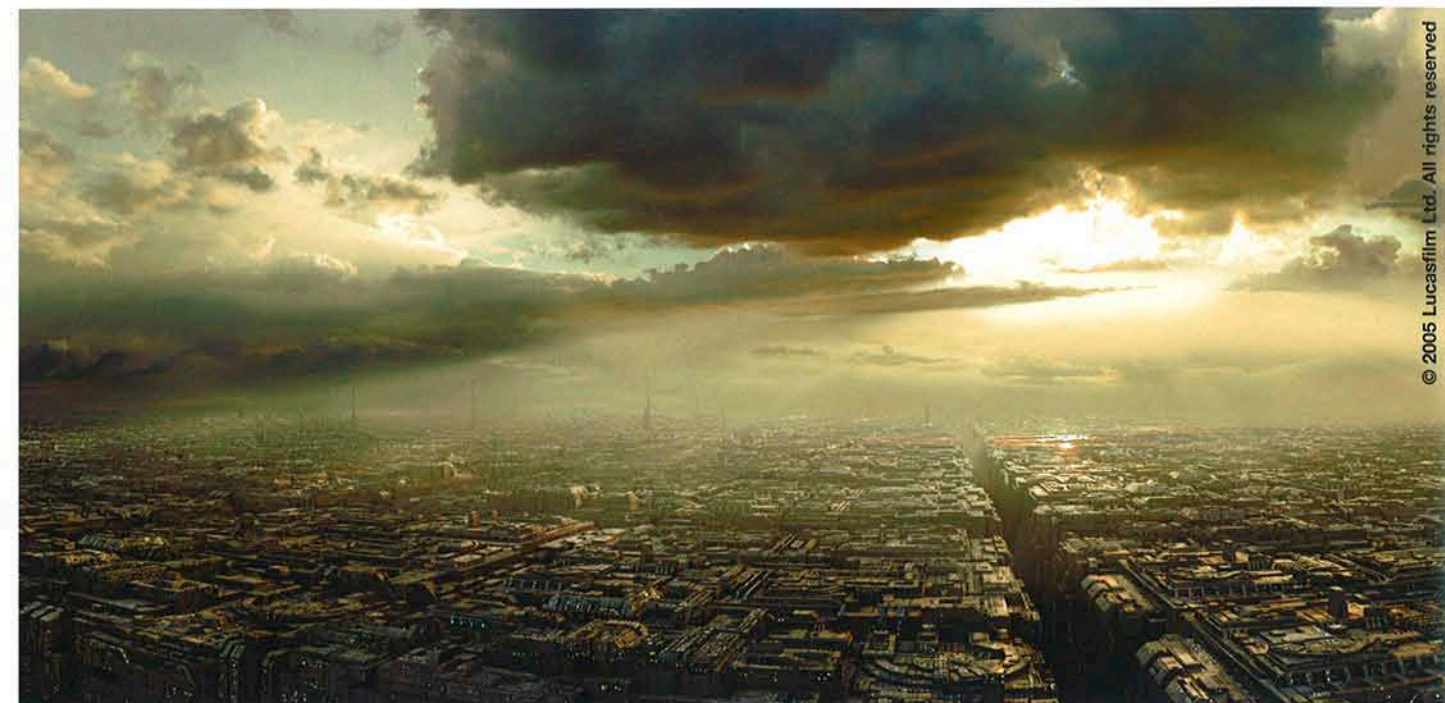
when I started learning CAD and taking many animation electives that I found a new passion for the digital art world. I soon found myself traveling down the road to becoming a matte painter.

Paid work

Many of my first commercial assignments happened when I was still in college. My first paid job was for a dear friend and Architect who needed me to model and light a 3D architectural fly-through of a large house he had designed for a client. It was a great deal of fun! I got to create the interior and exterior of the house including the large yard and surrounding hills as well as day and night-time renderings. After that, my growing student portfolio landed me a few web page design jobs and work as an illustrator for a book on architectural structural failure.

Photo-real environments

Through many computer animation classes I learned the basics of 3D software and compositing. In my free time (there's not a lot of that in Architecture school) I would paint with a Wacom tablet and create varying types of art—abstract paintings, stylized paintings of buildings, etc. I soon realized that though I was having fun designing buildings for my school projects, I loved creating the renderings of them even more! I soon found the challenge of creating photo-real renderings for my building designs and always wanted more of that. After college I got a job as an architectural illustrator for a small architectural firm in Berkeley. As an architectural illustrator you create renderings that show what the buildings and their environment will look like when they are built. A year later I moved to a company called Michael Sechman and Associates.



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Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith: A cityscape of Coruscant which was extensively used for the Jedi Temple scene.

Michael Sechman specialized in architectural illustration (both digital and old-school), and I earned a great deal about creating artwork and CG there. Architectural illustration is a lot like matte painting. I learned about creating environments and realized how the models, lighting and composition can be very similar to matte painting. I spent many of my free evenings and weekends working on my own personal matte paintings at home. I planned to spend, or at least I say 'sacrifice' about a year-and-a-half to work on matte paintings in my free time to grow and understand more about the craft. Once I felt my paintings were up to par, I created a demo-reel that landed me a job as Digital Matte Artist at Matte World Digital. Though I didn't start to digitally paint more of my shots, I learned how to use digital photo-reference in and for

my work. Not everything has to be painted or CG to be a digital matte painting. All that matters is that it looks real.

Working in film

About half way through college (1996) I decided I wanted to work in film, but I wasn't sure exactly what kind of digital artist I wanted to be or could be. I decided to finish Architecture school and in the mean time I kept working on my artwork. I discovered what matte painting was around 1998 and saw a direct correlation with my then current job as an architectural illustrator. The want to work on Star Wars (specifically the beautiful architecture of Coruscant) brought me to Industrial Light & Magic.

Digital tools

I currently use 3dsmax, Photoshop, a Wacom tablet, Shake and ILM's

proprietary 3D software. The software I've used in the past ranged greatly. For 3D alone I've used: Zoom; ArchiCAD; AutoCAD; Strata; PowerAnimator; and Maya. I agree with people when they say 'the software you use isn't as important as the artwork you create'.

Learning the craft

I learned the importance of being very meticulous with my color palette from Chris Evans and Brett Northcutt at Matte World Digital. I didn't learn how to camera-map until about 1998. Though camera-mapping is valuable, learning advanced camera-mapping techniques can be amazing, especially for us painter types. I learned a great deal of advanced techniques from Glenn Cotter at Matte World Digital and Yanick Dusseault and Toshi Maeda at ILM.

The process

I've worked on all types of matte paintings (2D, 2.5D and 3D). My favorites are either futuristic cities, or period architectural paintings and I get the most enjoyment out of creating 2.5D and 3D shots. It's also fun when the shots are longer than the typical 4 to 6 second matte shots, that way you really get to show off the environment. In 'The Last Samurai' I had the pleasure of creating San Francisco in the year 1876 (a 3D shot). For 'The Majestic' I recreated the look of the Graumann's Chinese Theater in the 1950s (2.5D). For 'The Ring' I created a long 52 second 3D shot flying up to a lighthouse and over a large part of Moesko island. For 'Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith', I created a variety of Coruscant 2D, 2.5D and 3D paintings. The longest continuous matte painting on screen is the Landing Platform shot (p.140), it's 30 seconds long



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Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith: The landing platform scene used a camera-mapped city matte painting for a 170 degree fly-around.

and shows about 170 degrees of the city. The process of each project is different, especially when camera-mapping a 2.5D scene. A 2D matte painting is simple. I usually paint and assemble elements from back to front. With 3D, I determine what the camera needs to see and then proceed to model, texture and light it. However, there is no single rule for how to camera map a scene, it really comes down to one thing: how much of your scene does your camera see? Since the goal of camera-mapping is to make things easier to paint and more efficient, you want to make sure you are doing this the right way and not making things more difficult than they need to be. When camera-mapping, make sure you get the camera move as close to final as possible, then you can setup still cameras that can project your painting(s). Try to choose positions for

camera projections that will allow you to paint in the fewest number of matte paintings possible. This allows you to paint things relative to each other in the shot and reduces the management of paintings and how they join.

Advice for artists

Many people ask: "How do I get a job in the film industry?" My answer is commit yourself. If you feel you could be learning more than your day-job teaches you, find a way to do it. Work on painting in your free time, read about the art, ask people online and watch all the visual effects tricks they reveal on DVDs. It's also very important to practice creating photo-real digital matte paintings that are like those you enjoy in movies. Focus on basic skills like painting, lighting and composition and get really good at them. These are difficult skills and take a long time to attain.

Learning 3D modeling and basic compositing can be important too, but these are skills that are a little easier to learn. Find an artist whose opinion you value and ask them to critique your work. Take those critiques and use them, don't be afraid to change your painting or parts of it several times. Get used to it. In the film industry, your peers, supervisors and the director are going to ask you to make changes. Keep learning—artists we should always keep learning how to be better.

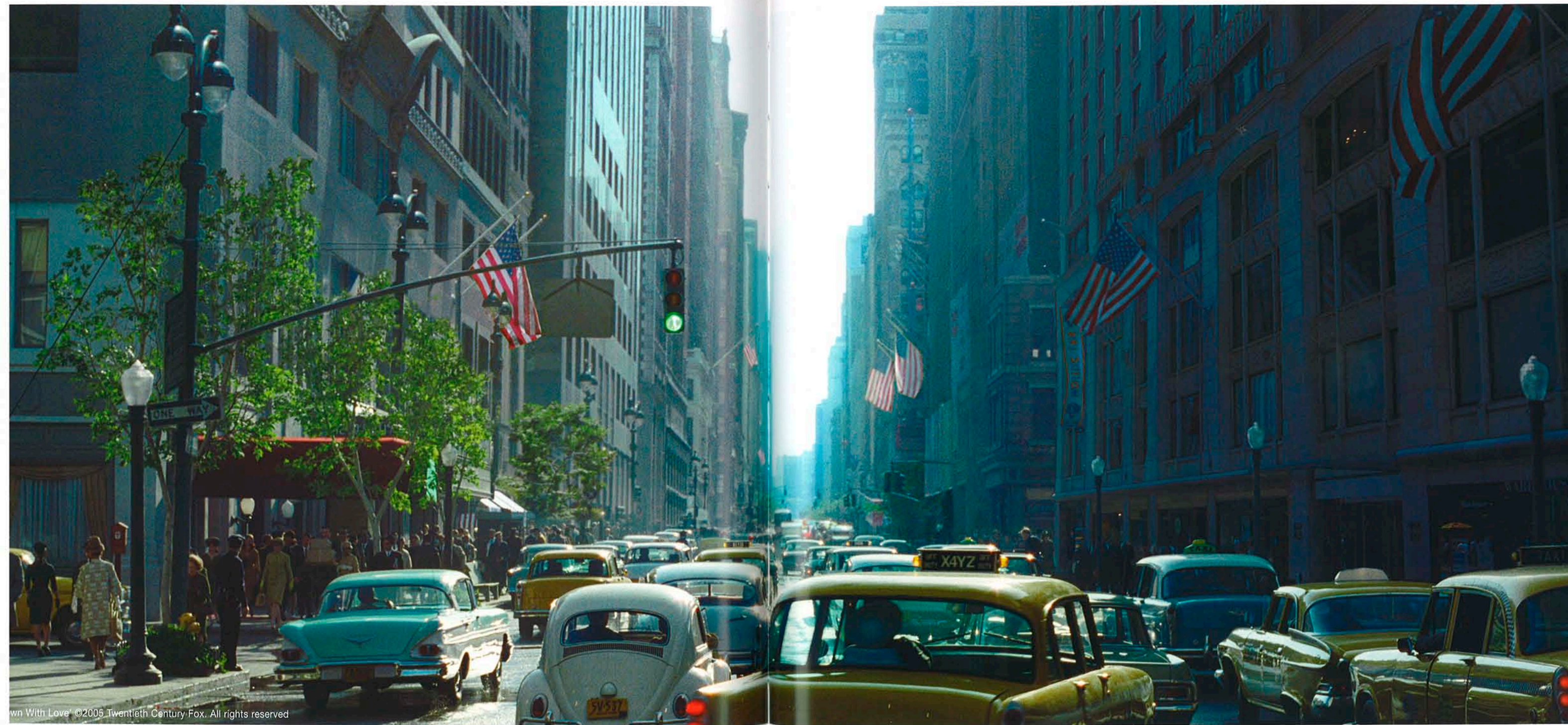
The future of matte painting

In recent years matte painting has become more popular. More digital artists know what a matte painting is than ever before. It seems as though the movie industry is also growing more familiar with uses of digital matte paintings and digital environments. I hope this encourages Hollywood to

'greenlight' a lot more quality stories that take place in exciting places and times. With this, the industry could be able to support a large number of matte artists, especially those of us who are quick as well as talented.

The future for Chris Stoski

My current plans are to continue working as a matte artist. I feel like there are many things I still want to learn and do as a matte painter. I am currently surrounded by many very talented people at ILM. Some are veterans and some beginners, but they are all talented nonetheless. I love these environments where I can learn from people and share with others the lessons I've learned. I also enjoy working on high-profile films. Getting to create some interesting matte paintings for Star Wars was ideal for me, and I hope to find more projects like it coming my way.



own With Love' ©2005 Twentieth Century Fox. All rights reserved

own With Love: Madison Ave

this shot of Madison Avenue I painted this 2D matte painting of the city canyon that is New York City. Since the plate was shot on the Universal Studios backlot, I had to make all the things appear as they did in 1963 and match the lighting to all the period cars. I'm most proud of the CG American flags, particularly the two closest to camera.

The flag on the right is in shadow and you can see the texture, wrinkles and seams I painted to make it convincing. Second, the flag on the left is backlit and appears to glow as the sunlight illuminates it. I animated all the flags in the scene with a cloth simulator which helped me produce very realistic motion and complex folding and billowing.

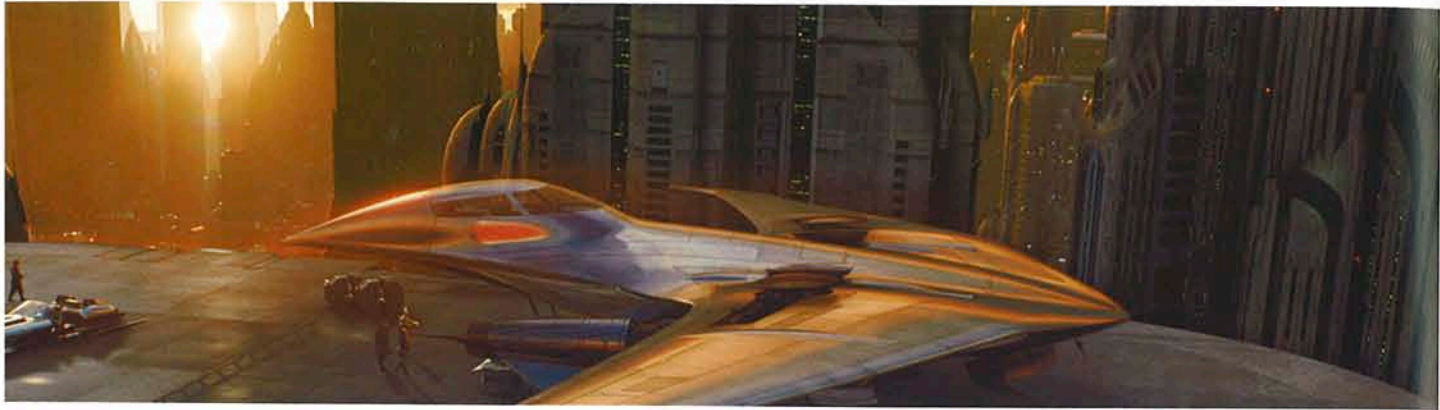


Down With Love' ©2005 Twentieth Century Fox. All rights reserved

Down With Love: New York aerial

This is the opening shot for Down With Love. Recreating New York city in the year 1963 was a great deal of fun. The entire shot was created with one camera-map. Though there were a few minor patches supplementing the camera-map, it's a perfect example of how a cleverly designed camera path can reduce the amount of technical work and allow more time to work on the artwork. In this 3D matte painting,

the camera approaches the city as it pushes through the clouds and slowly dips ever so subtly downwards. This move allowed me to avoid revealing the 'echo' that building camera-map projections leave on the ground behind them. At full-scale on the big screen the shot boasts a variety of life from the many boats traveling the rivers, the air traffic in the distance and even people and cars on the streets and waterfront areas.



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MOVIE MATTE PAINTING: STAR WARS CORUSCANT

Setting the scene

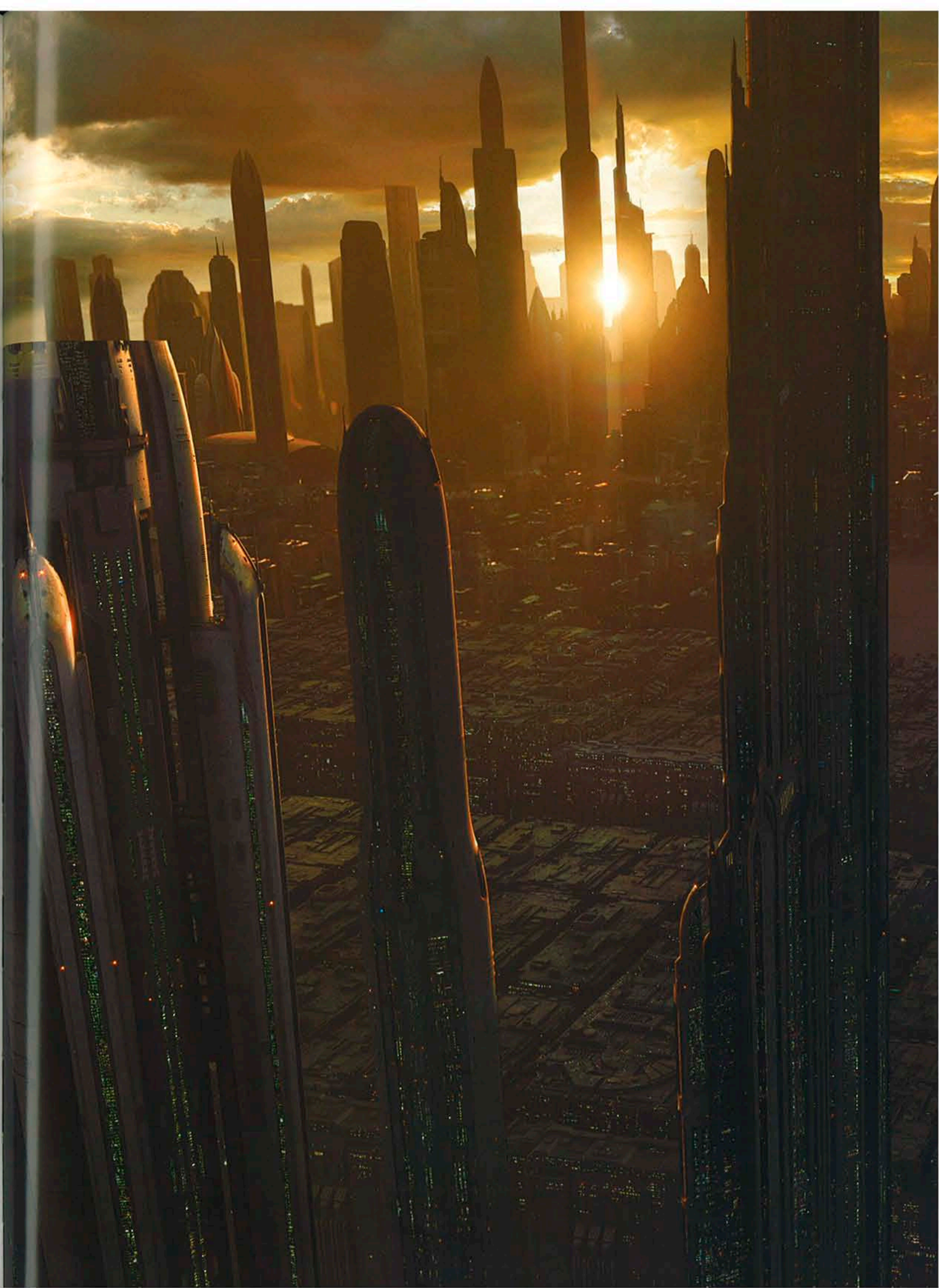
For 'Star Wars Episode III Revenge of the Sith', I was assigned this long 3D shot of Coruscant (an entire planet covered in cities). 711 frames the shot is on screen for almost 30 seconds and the camera move reveals the environment around the platform as well as much of the city's architecture.

The final matte painting

The Coruscant scene was composed of the final matte painting composited with ships, people and the floating landing platform. Everything in the shot was CG (computer graphics and matte painting) except the people in the foreground who were shot on green-screen.

Digital Artists

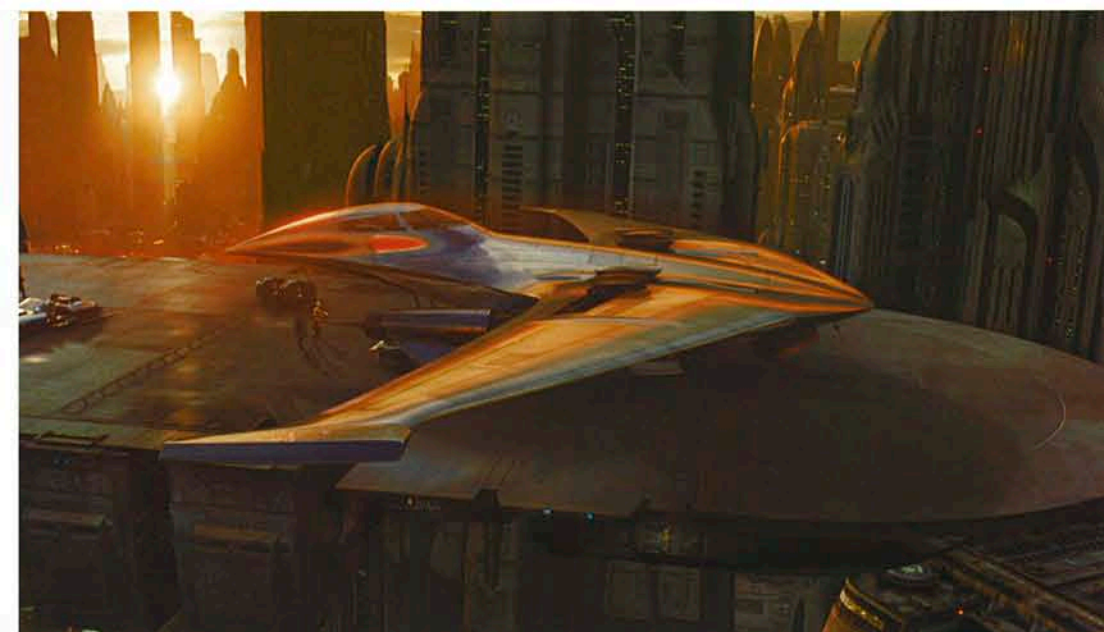
Chris Stoski, Yanick Dusseault, Toshi Maeda and Jeremy Cook.





Landing platform

The following sequence of five images illustrate the ship, landing platform and surrounding city as the camera slowly approaches and turns. After George Lucas approved the camera animation focusing on the ship, I tried to set up the composition of building clusters and open space in a way that would allow direct light to spill upon it.



Illumination

I painted the sun setting between the far buildings and illuminating the distant atmosphere. Here, we can see the interaction of the sunlight and the metal panels on the floor of the platform as well as the shadows from people, cargo boxes and transports. Once again, the composition draws the eye toward the ship despite the two large buildings in the frame. These towers are backlit, therefore, they don't draw attention to themselves and block the eye from wondering too far into the background.

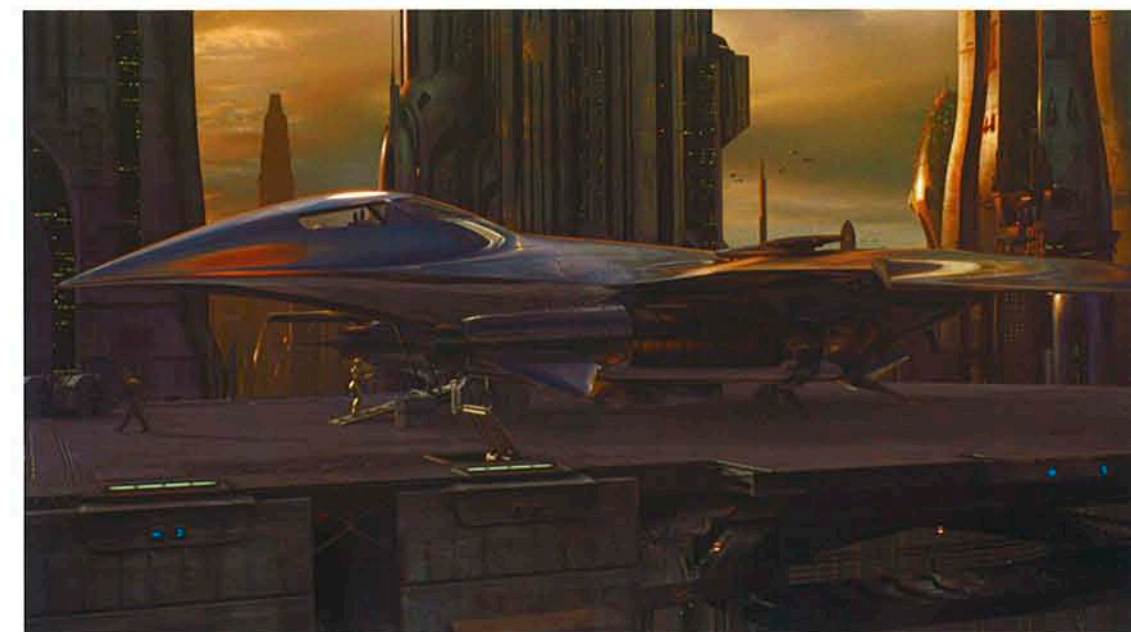


Revealing the city

As the camera continues to dolly inward and pan to the right, the shadowed side of the landing platform keeps the eye focused on the ship. Now glimpses of the cityscape beyond the two foreground towers reveal a more complicated colour palette—one that is not overly monochromatic. Throughout the shot we can see how the matte painting and its color palette can effect the other elements. We can see the warm hues from the sunlit clouds in the distance and the cool blues of the sky above (suggested in the last frame of the shot) in the reflections of the chrome-like Naboo Skiff spaceship.

Air traffic

As Padme and C-3PO board the Naboo Skiff, we can also see subtle details like distant air traffic. Adding these types of elements give life to the matte painting and help develop the sense of a realistic, bustling and living city.



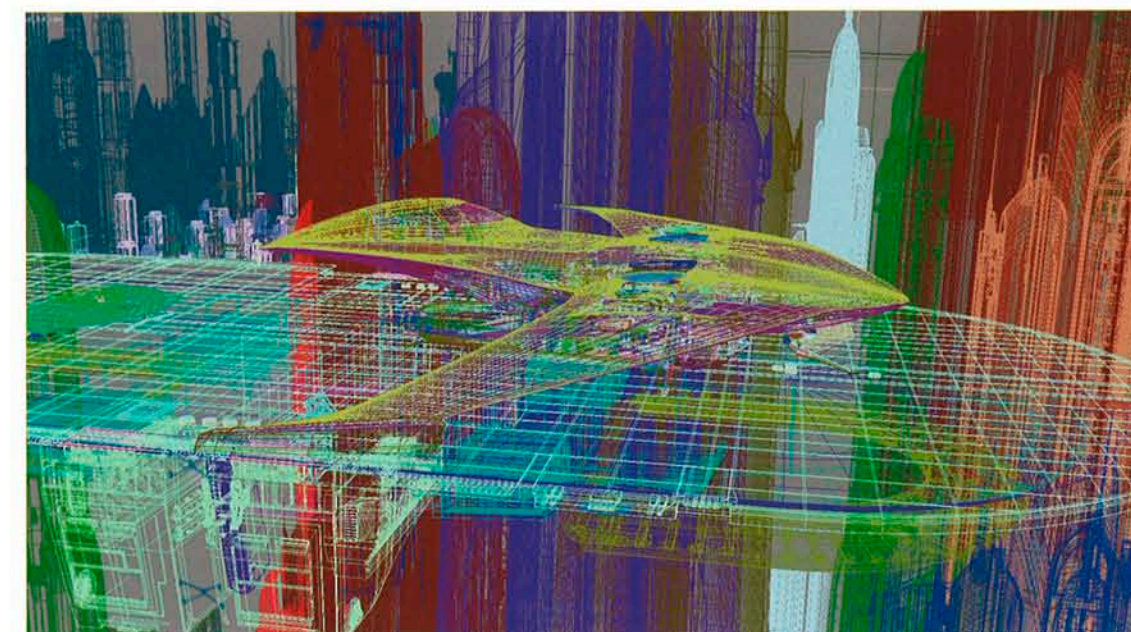
From general to precise

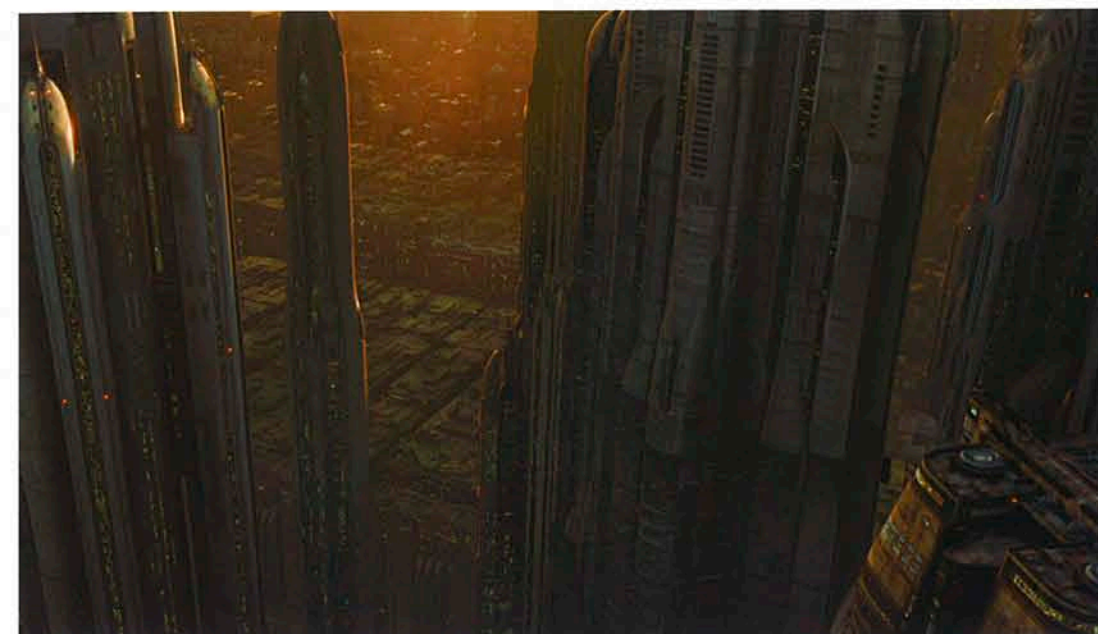
Though the city-planet of Coruscant is visually busy, the camera move helps the audience focus in on the ship and those boarding for a clear understanding of what our characters are doing. From start to finish, the camera path and city layout guide the viewer from general to precise. By the end, the shot describes both the look of the grand cityscape and the actions of the characters.



Cohesiveness

The wireframe shown here illustrates the large number of polygons that make up just part of the shot. The entire shot had to be split into several files to maintain efficiency. This can pose a problem when trying to paint a realistic and cohesive environment. Since the foreground ship and characters were going to be composited into the shot later by a compositor I concentrated on the rest of the elements in an attempt to make the city environment as believable as possible.





The environment

Due to the constant movement of the camera, there are elements of the shot that are obscured in the composition keyframes by the landing platform and ship. However, it is important to remember that they will at one time or another be revealed throughout the shot. The following five frames illustrate the environment only. The ship and foreground elements have been excluded to better display the issues that arise when designing and painting a complex 3D shot.

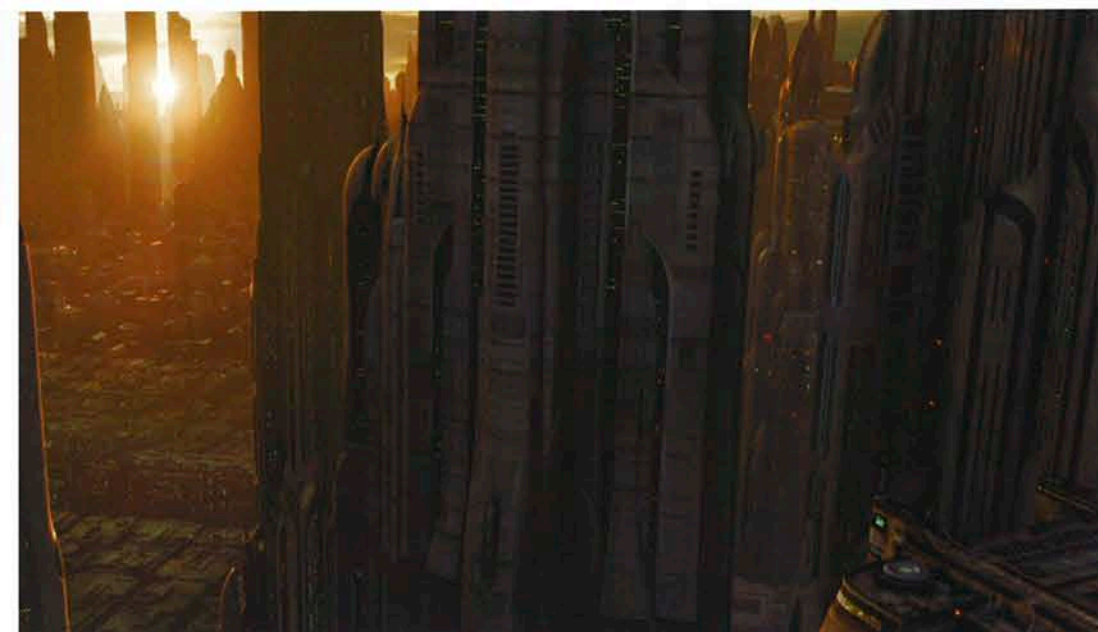
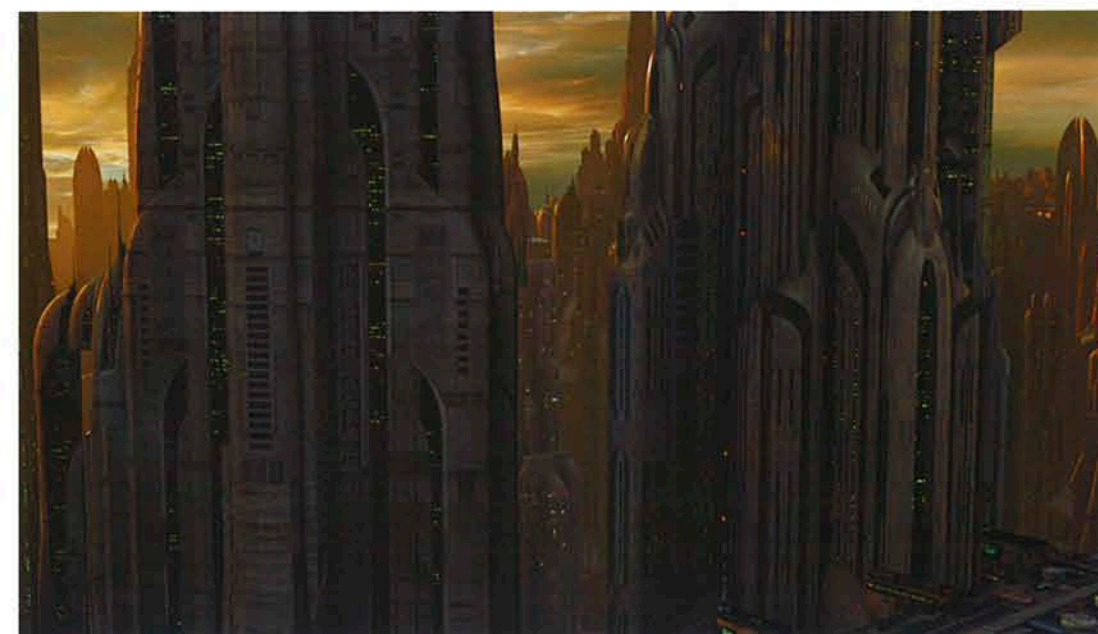


Photo-realistic exposure

As the camera tilts and pans across the 3D matte painting, the sunset and distant buildings come into view. This part of the shot posed a difficult problem; how can I create photo-realistic exposure in the matte painting while the camera looks directly into the sun and still be able to see the foreground elements? The lighting and exposure of the sunset and its relationship to the foreground buildings was dealt with in one painting. This part of the matte painting is shown in detail with a shot breakdown in the following pages.



Cycloramas

Four distinct parts make up this 3D matte painting. The foreground buildings, and the left, center and right background cyc's (cycloramas). This frame shows part of each of the three cyc's (screen left, middle and right), their joints are permanently hidden by the two prominent towers.

Showing architecture

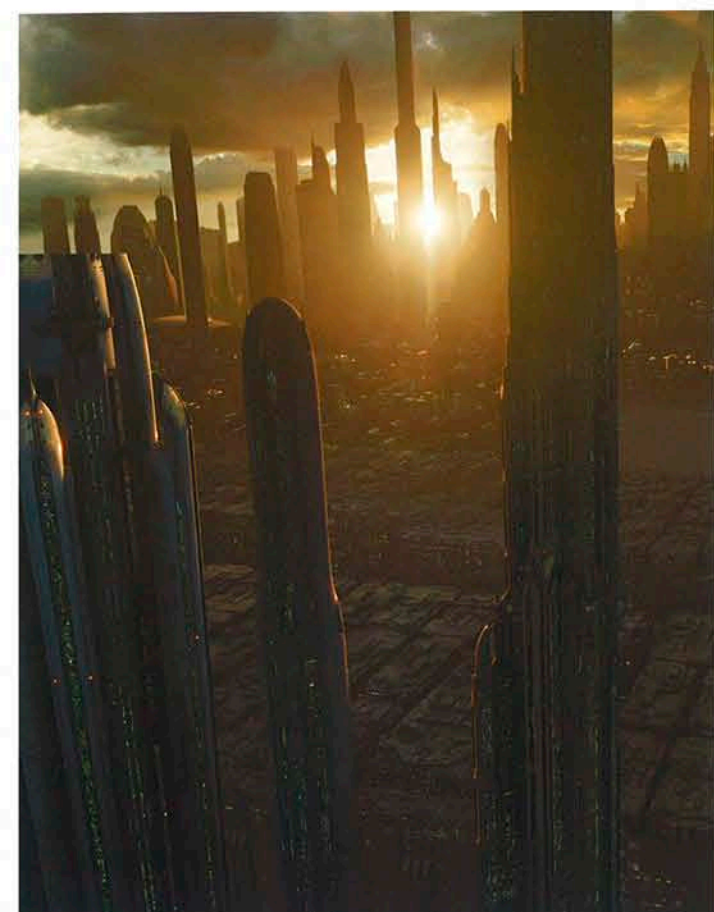
The composition of the last frames of the shot was meant to feel like the city was thick in architecture, but not uncomfortably confining. So I created an opening between the major foreground elements that would frame small vistas of the distant rooftops. These areas of the painting create a section of interest and complexity, without drawing too much attention to themselves.



Setting the scene

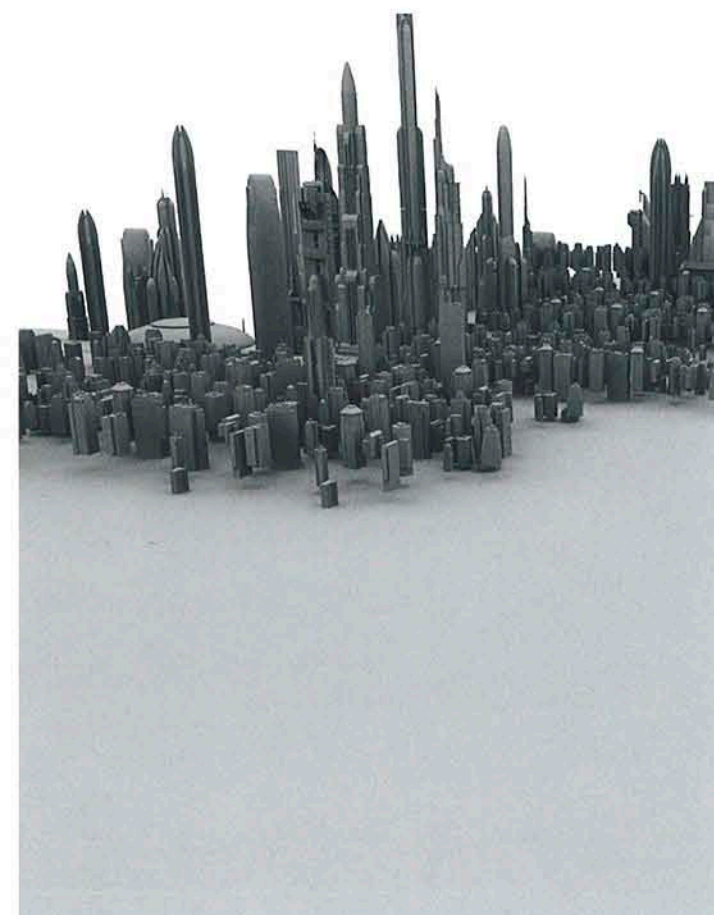
The last frame in the shot is almost exactly as I composed it in my early animatic. The foreground building masses reach beyond the edges of the frame with darker values and keep the eye focused on the central areas of the shot where the ship, characters and its entry ramp will later be composited. Throughout the planning of this entire matte painting, it was necessary to always remember that though the subject matter of this sunset environment was interesting, the landing platform and the characters boarding the ship are the reason the film needed this shot in the first place.





Left cyclorama

Here is the matte painting (left cyc) with a few foreground buildings. I included these foreground buildings in the matte painting to make it easier to accurately paint the lighting, shadows, color and other effects on them. When the buildings were complete, they were camera-mapped back onto their geometry or sometimes simple cards.

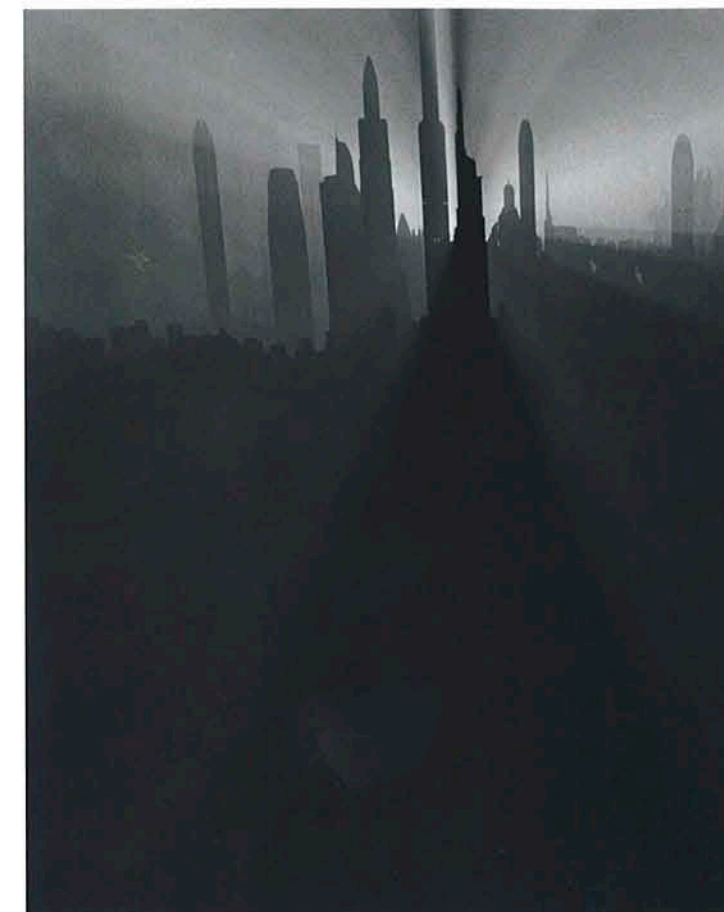


Ambient occlusion pass

This pass was used to add shadows to the scene from the ambient light of the sky. This pass would be the same no matter where the sun's position is.

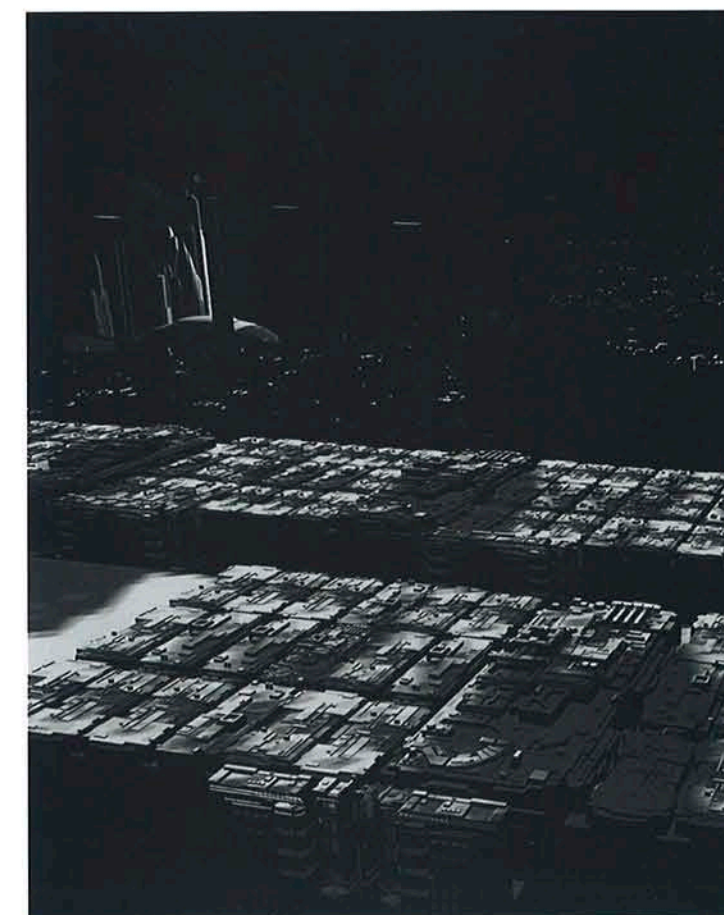
Volumetric sunlight pass

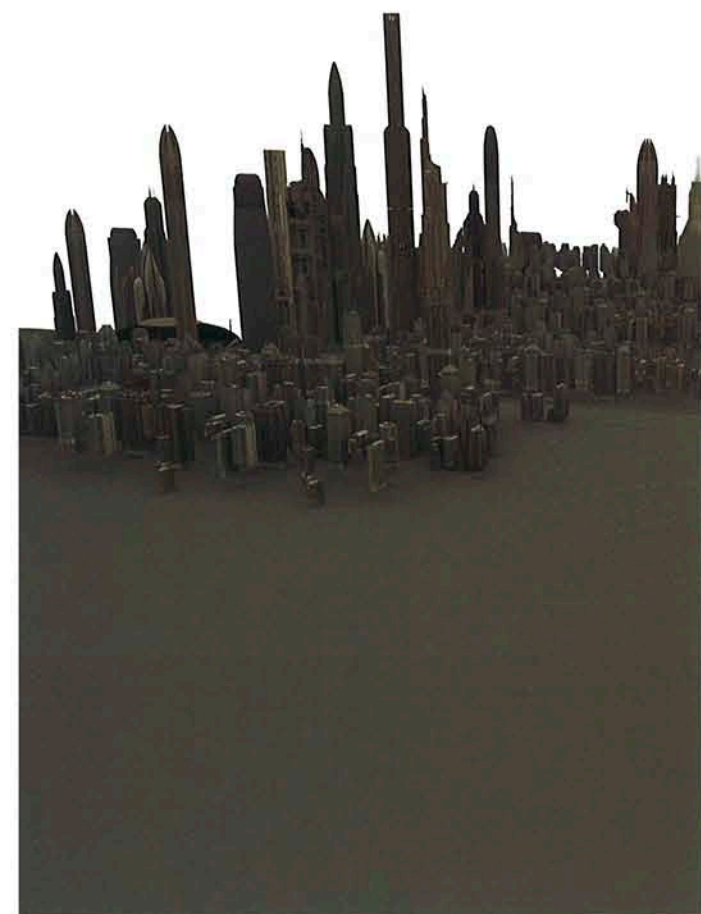
This is a render pass that simulates the sun illuminating the atmosphere with building shadows.



Sun keylight pass

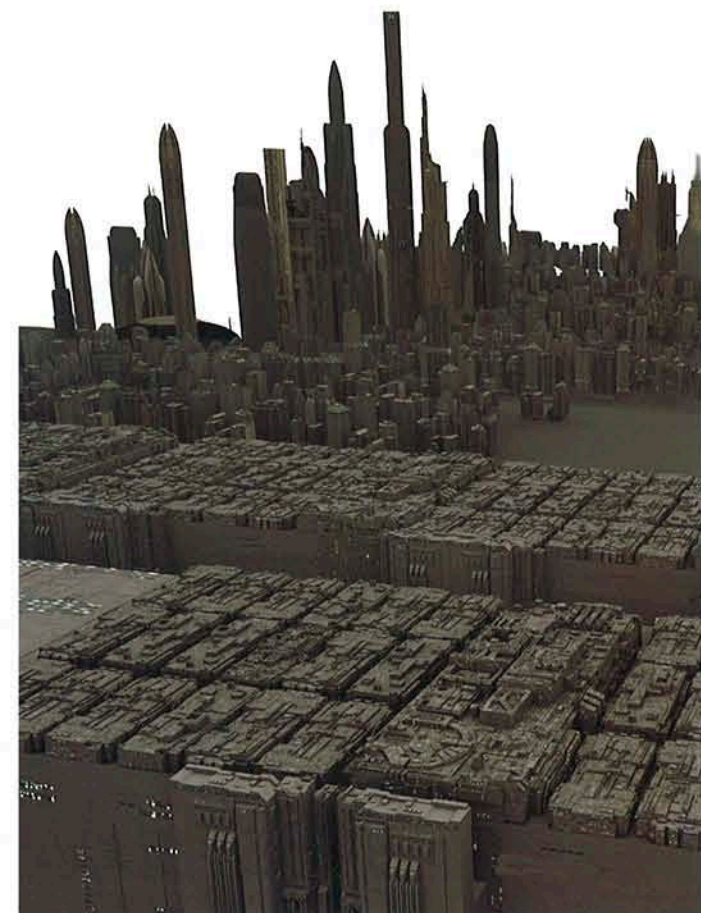
This is the only keylight in the scene. It tells us what objects and surfaces the sun is hitting from our camera's point of view.





Diffuse pass

Here we have the diffuse pass with the Ambient Occlusion pass multiplied over it. The ambient shadows affect the diffuse pass but still reveal the colour and texture. The area where I plan to add the sun is intentionally kept a bit darker and has less visible detail than the rest of the model. This is to help me achieve that photo-real look when looking into the sun. If I had too much detail in those regions, the scene would look too fabricated.

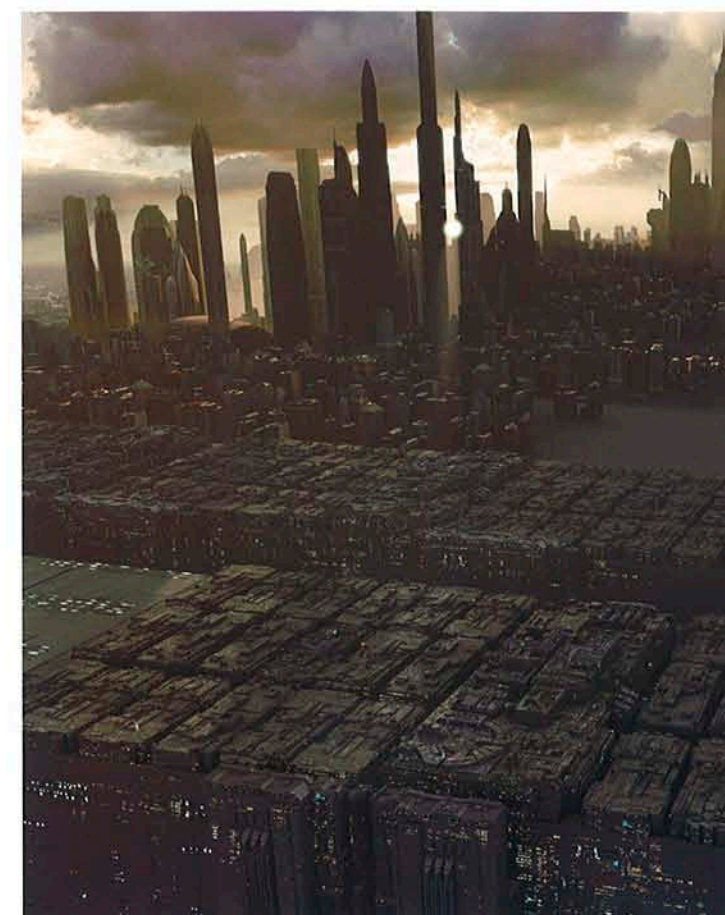


Only create what you need

The same thing was done here to the foreground megastructures (boxes). Since the geometry count was so high in these models it was necessary to split them up into separate scenes and combine them in Photoshop. This image illustrates the objects of the cyc with diffuse and ambient occlusion passes combined. Note the gaps and empty areas of the model. In a large CG model and matte painting, only create the elements you will see in the shot or need to help you visualize a more successful painting. I put the 'empty' areas out of mind and concentrate on what will be seen in the final film. In the production environment you need all the time you can get to make that paintings look real.

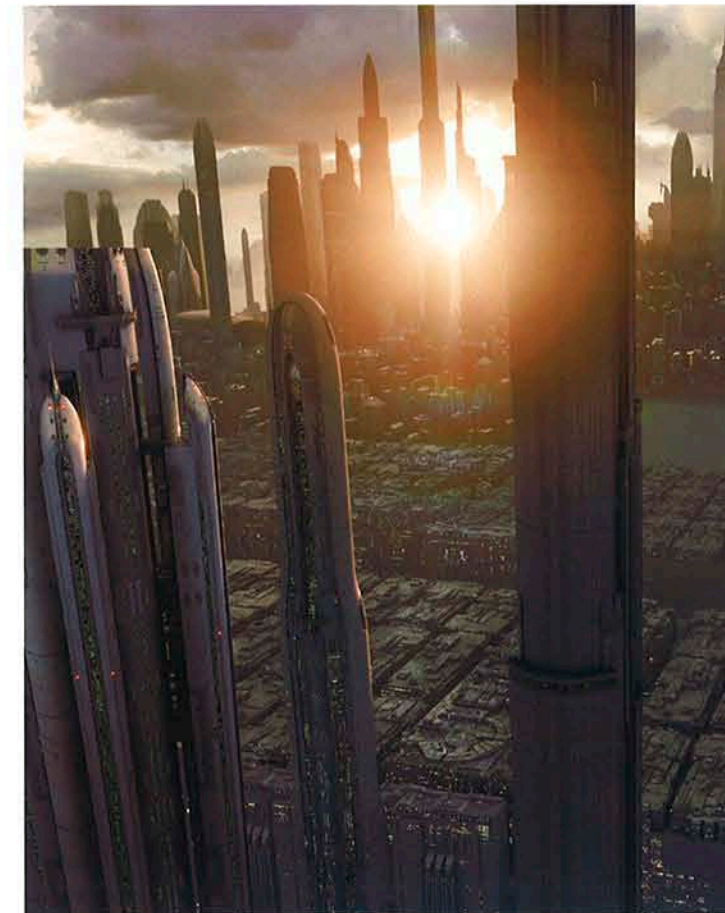
Sky, horizon and illuminated windows

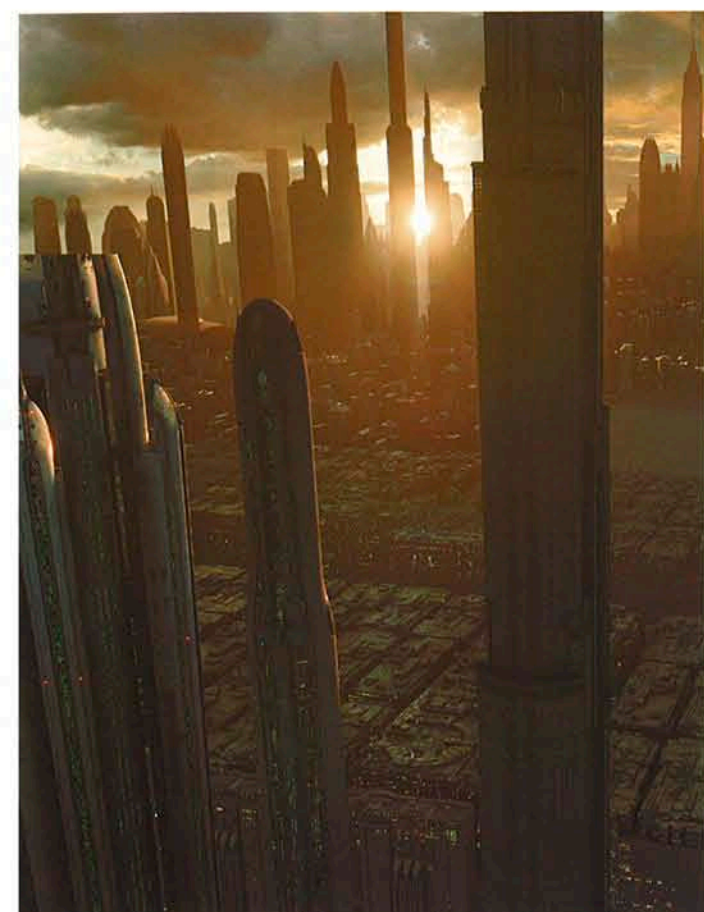
The most obvious element added here is the sky. However, it's important to notice the subtle ways I started to add both the volumetric pass and the keylight pass (previous spread). In Photoshop, you can use these passes as masks for painting and adjusting color curves to get the desired effect. For example, this is how I 'lit' the rooftops in the foreground and midground with a warm, subtle light. Also note the added painted buildings, horizon line and the illuminated windows on the foreground walls.



Foreground buildings

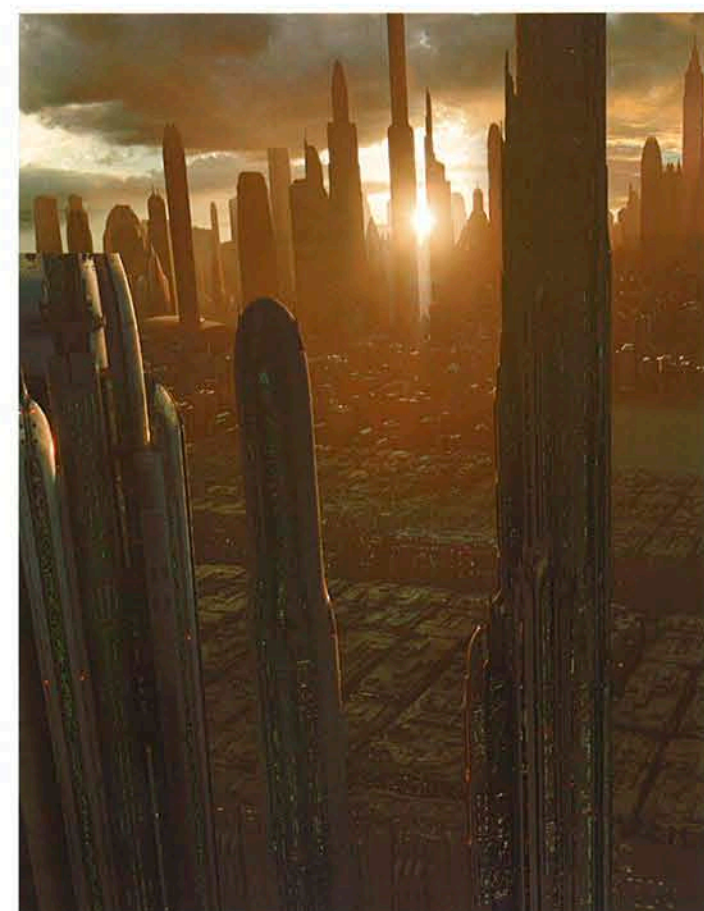
I added the foreground buildings to the painting so I could start working on the final look of them. They were created with the same technique I mentioned previously. However, they'll receive more tweaking as the painting grows closer to final. From this point on I keep them in close consideration. Here, I've also added a sun flare that might simulate the look of the final flare and started playing with the overall color of the shot to find something warm in lit areas, but keeping the cooler tones in the shadows to avoid that monochromatic look.





Illuminating the atmosphere

I've added more color adjustments and haze to the whole shot. I figured that if the sun was illuminating the atmosphere more, it would give us more depth and therefore more range to work with—especially when the foreground platform and ship was added. Though the foreground buildings received haze, the background elements received the most to simulate reality. Removing the magenta and adding green to the shot helped the believability of the shot. As a result, it's a little less 'candy'-colored and a little more real.

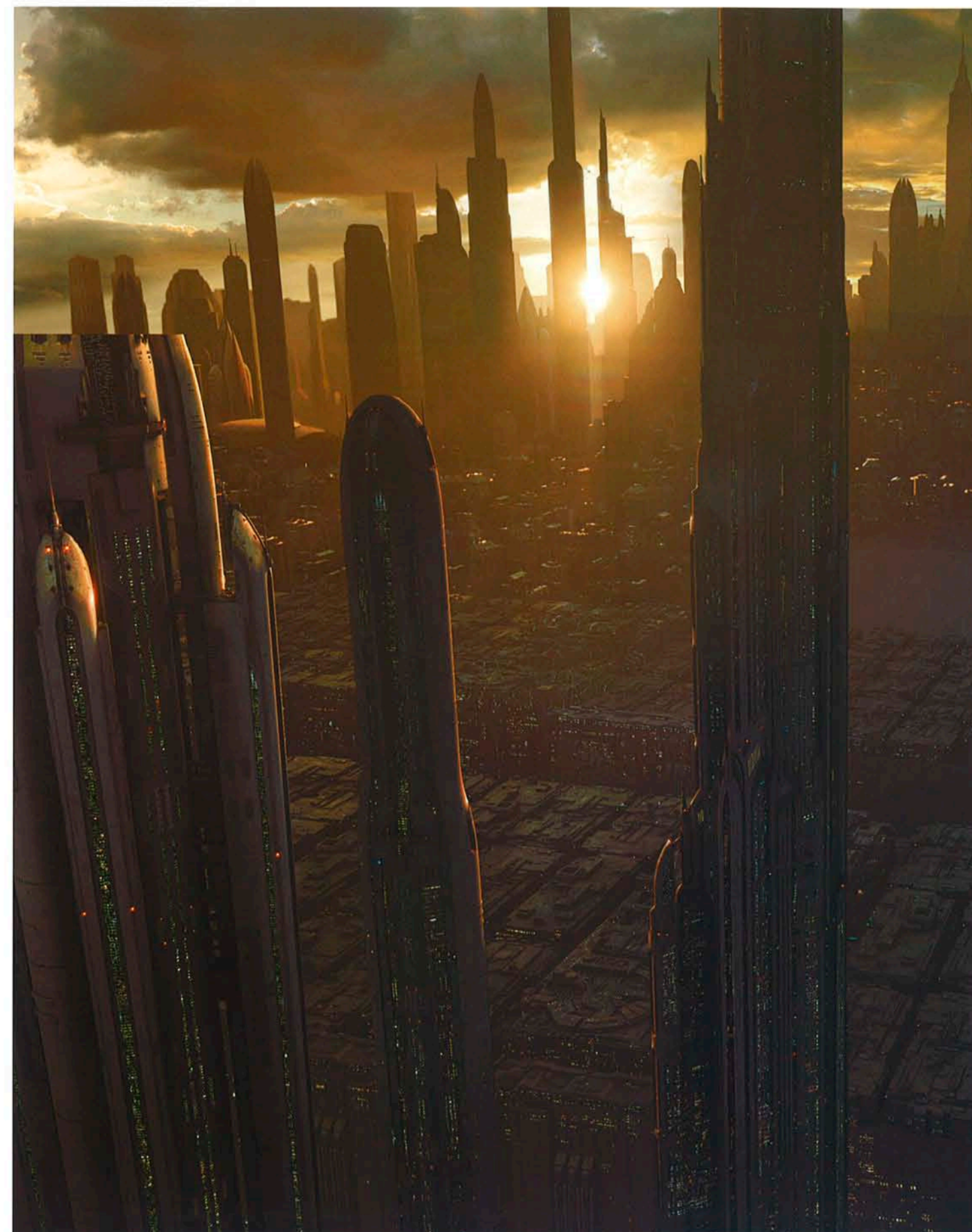


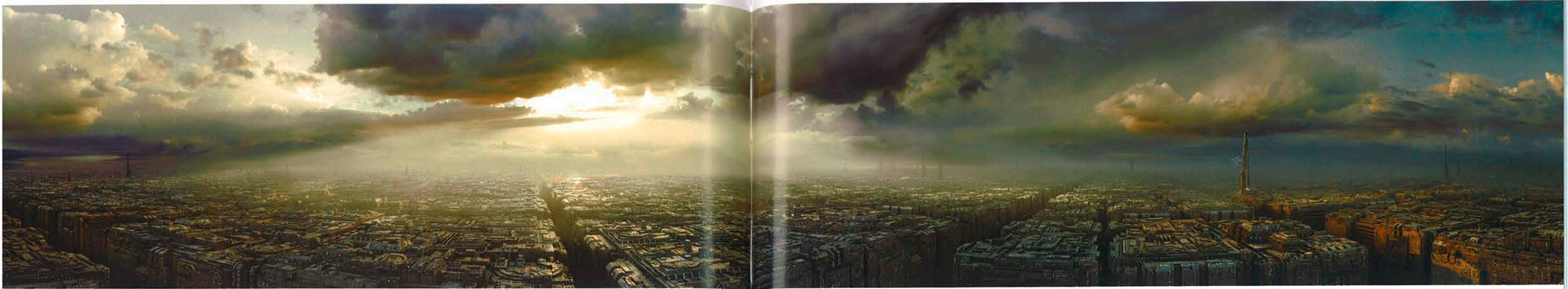
More chaos

Here one of the foreground buildings was replaced, and a more interesting structure was added. It's important to always consider change in a shot. In this case, the right foreground tower simply wasn't working. The entire scene is fabricated in CG and when that happens, it's good to consider elements that will bring more 'chaos' and visual complexity to your scene. You will still have to work hard at making things look real, but a nicely designed shot has a higher success rate at fooling people into believing it's real than a simple one does.

Final environment

This is the look of the final cyc and foreground buildings. This is how they looked when they were projected back onto 3D geometry. The sun is painted in a manner that allows for a photo-real foundation below a dynamic lens flare. This will be added in the final composite. However, there is an intentional lack of detail in the area immediately surrounding the sun to avoid any unwanted 'additive' artefacts. Overall, the color range of this cyc also avoids a monochromatic palette and the majority of the detail is concentrated in the areas that were obscured the least by the ship and landing platform.





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MOVIE MATTE PAINTING: STAR WARS JEDI TEMPLE

Understanding the scene

Though we've seen the Jedi Temple throughout the Star Wars prequels, never has its grandeur been portrayed in such light. The rooftops of the surrounding architecture are seen in all directions from the Temple. Anakin Skywalker's slow turn to the dark side. George Lucas wanted to supplement the scene with the approaching storm. With the use of several matte paintings, the weather creeps closer to the Temple and eventually shrouds the city in darkness. This is one of several matte paintings created to capture the change in tone and mood to support the story.

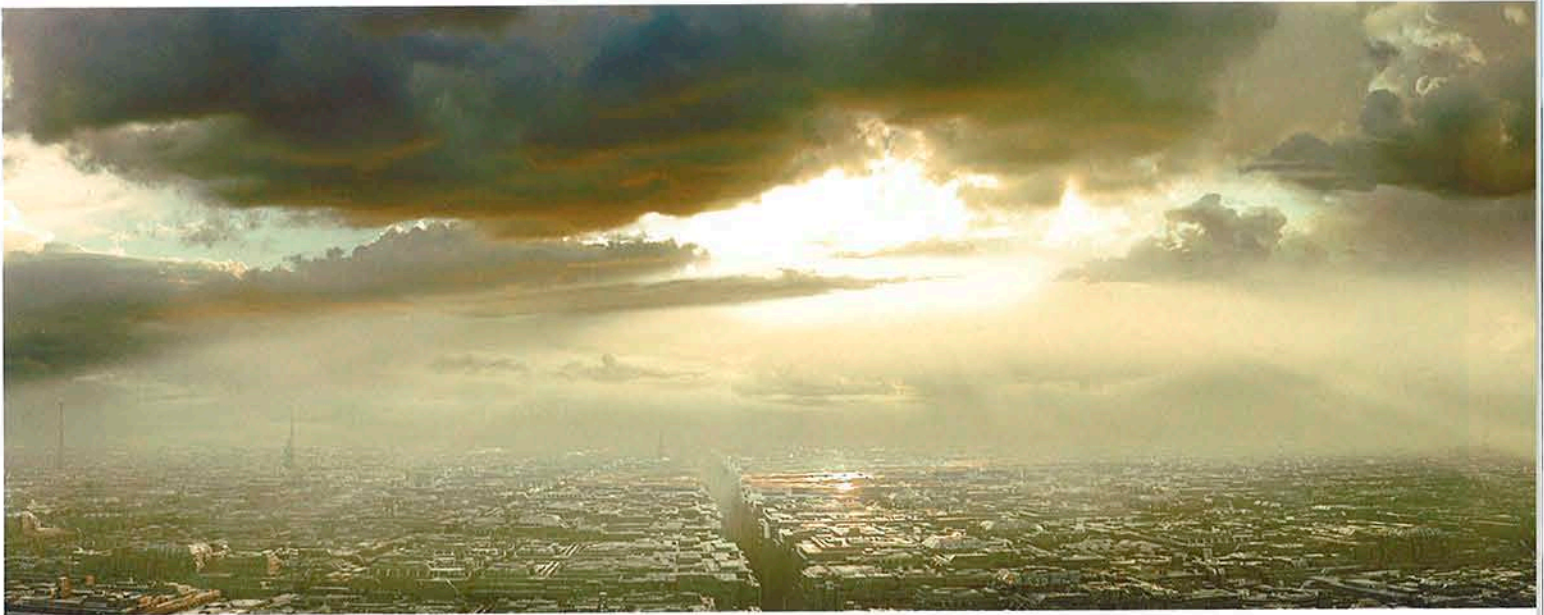
Constructing the shot

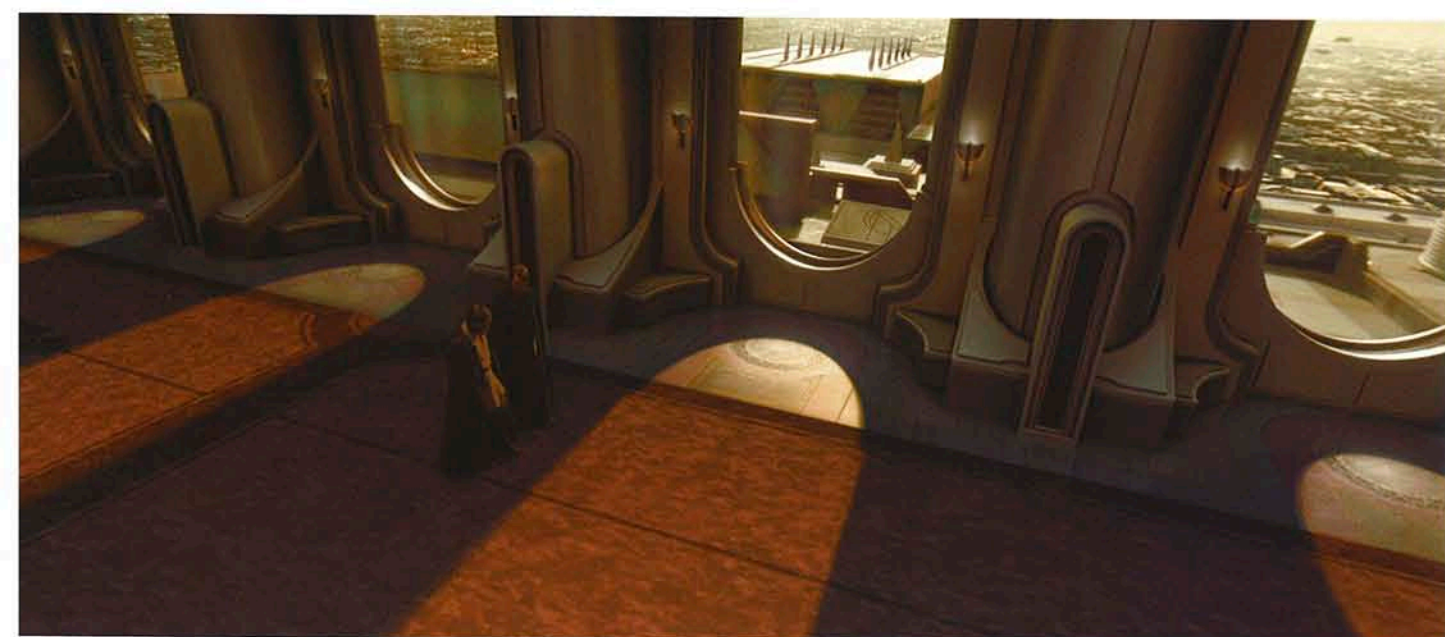
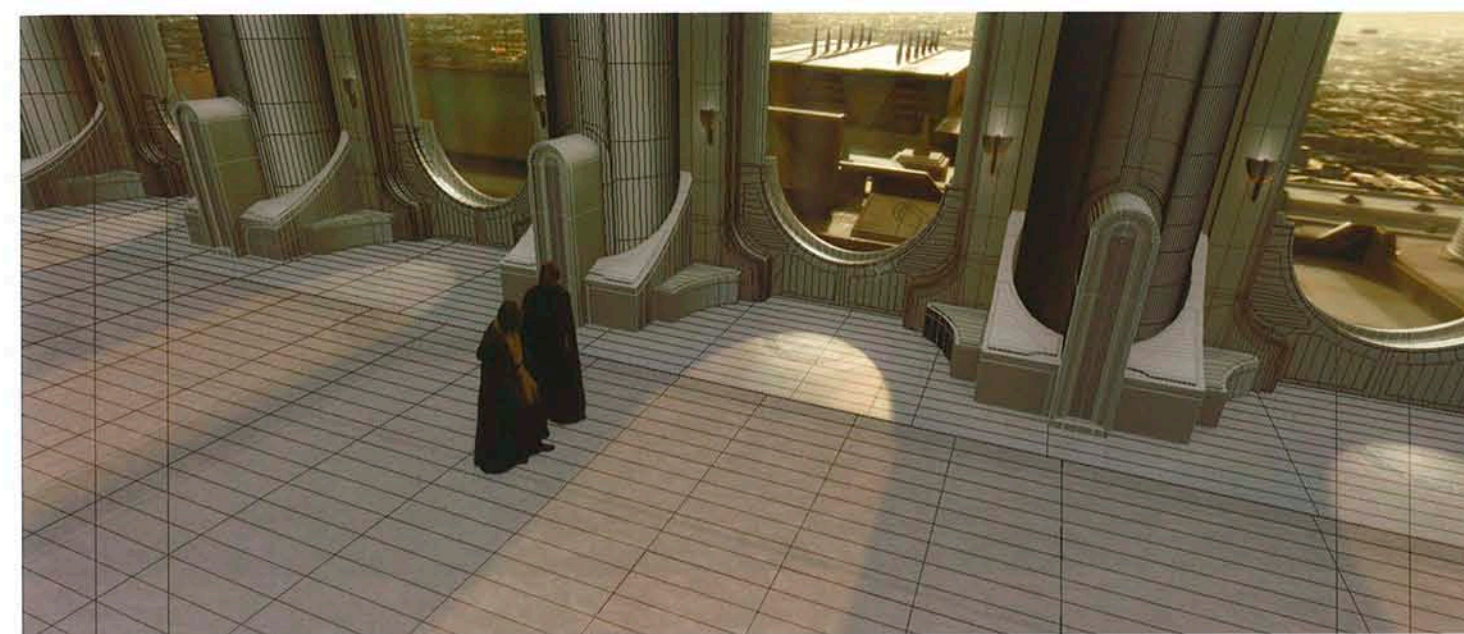
The cyc (cylorama) shows us approximately a 220-degree view from the Temple. In a hallway within the temple, Anakin and Obi-Wan have an important discussion about the Jedi Council. For this sequence, only a small part of the hallway was constructed as a stage set. The rest was created as a CG set extension. For the views outside the windows, only one close building was a model miniature; the rest is a digital matte painting. Since I had a CG camera that could show me the parts of the matte painting that would be featured through

the windows and the parts that would be obscured by columns, I could focus on the important parts of the painting and concentrate on making them as dramatic as possible.

Digital Artists

Chris Stoski, Toshi Maeda and Jeremy Cook.





nsistency

These are examples of how the matte painting was used in this sequence. As the characters move down the stairs and proceed into the hallway the camera pans with them. At the end, it seems we catch only a glimpse of the matte painting through the windows. However, through this long sequence, the camera slowly reveals almost every part of the temple. This is one of the many good reasons to create the matte painting as one large cyc. It makes it easier to keep the weather and lighting consistent throughout.

Lining up perspective and lighting angles

Though creating the cyc has its benefits, it's also necessary to ensure that when it's placed on a cylindrical CG model, the painting is aligned correctly so that the lighting angle and perspective line up with plate and set extensions. Here it's obvious by the sun and shadows on the hallway floor where the sun should be placed outside the windows. The lighting on the architecture outside should also be consistent with the interior.

Complex environment

As with most anything in the film industry, many people are involved in the creation of the final shot. Not only were the actors shot on a green screen stage, but here we can see the CG models of the hallway interior created by Jeremy Cook. The bright rooftop of the model miniature just outside the windows can be seen here as well, and the matte painting beyond all help to create a complex environment.

Iconic creations

As tension in the discussion between our two characters builds, they stop in front of one of the hallway's large windows. Backlit by the sun, the focus is purely on the characters and what they are saying. Though this shot in the sequence mainly shows the sky in my matte painting, it's my favorite in terms of composition, intensity, lighting and mood. Here, our two main characters are held up on the big screen, opposing each other in bright light and dark shadow. This symbolizes the rest of their lives. It's iconic and I'm proud to be part of it.



Final cyc

The final cyc has been cropped here to better illustrate the creation of the matte painting. In showing each of the proceeding steps, I'll discuss not only how the details are created, but how they affect the painting as a whole and their relationship to the passes used. Below are just a few of the many 3D render passes Toshi Maeda created for my matte painting. The passes for this type of painting have been similar in concept for many of the Coruscant shots. Once these general passes are created, the polygon count of a scene is no longer an issue. It makes it faster and more intuitive to bring beauty and aesthetics to the shot because it's all 2D from here.

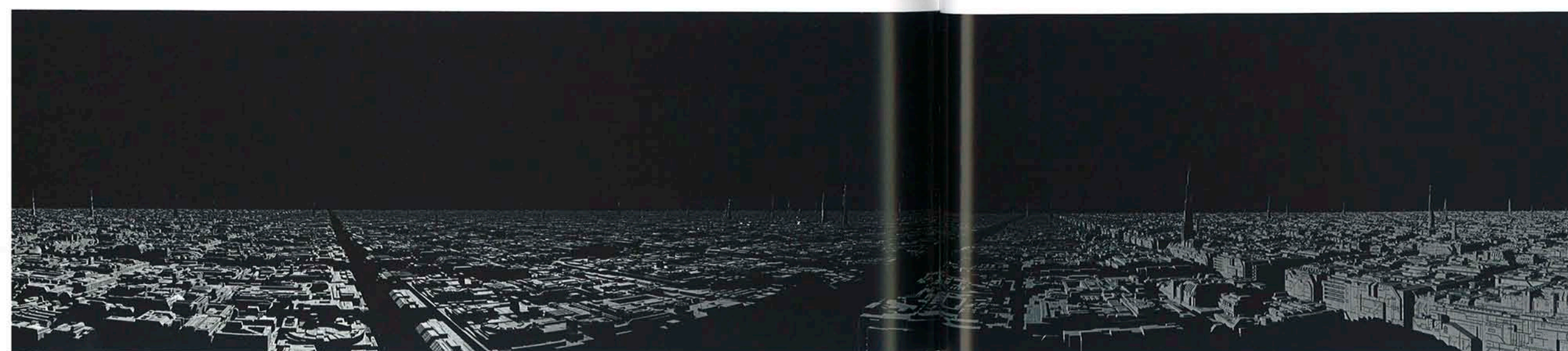
Fog pass

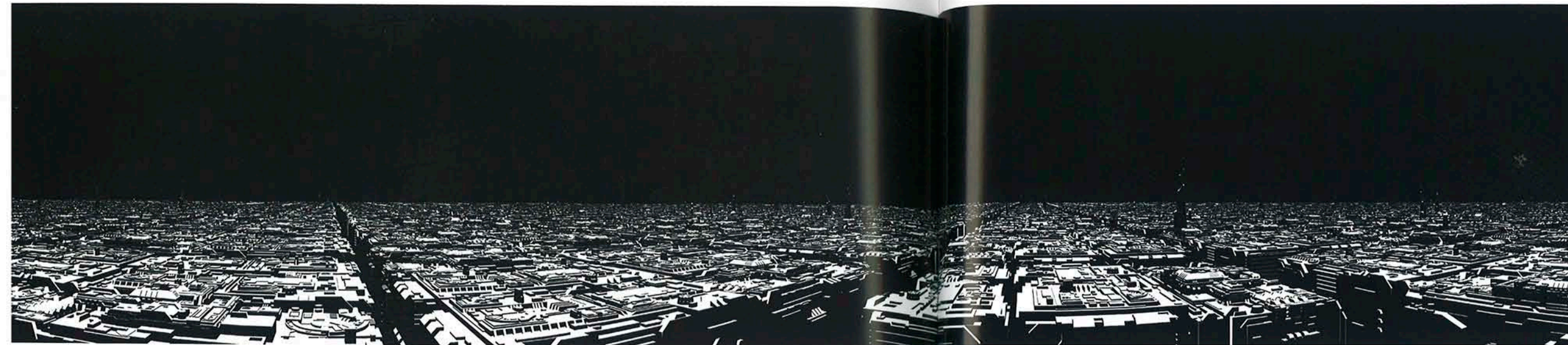
Only the fog in the scene is visible. The outline of the underlying geometry can be seen through the fog. However, the texture and lighting on geometry is not.



Sun Keylight pass

Similar to the Sun Keylight pass in the Coruscant landing platform matte painting, this pass shows us the geometry that is lit by the sun. However, note that the sun shadow resolution is higher and more detailed for this painting because the sun is higher in the sky than in the other shot. The softer, less obvious sun shadows on horizontal surfaces works better in a shot where the sun is low and near the horizon.





Tops pass

Here only the top faces of the geometry can be seen. This pass can be used in the final matte painting for controlling color and brightness of the top surfaces.



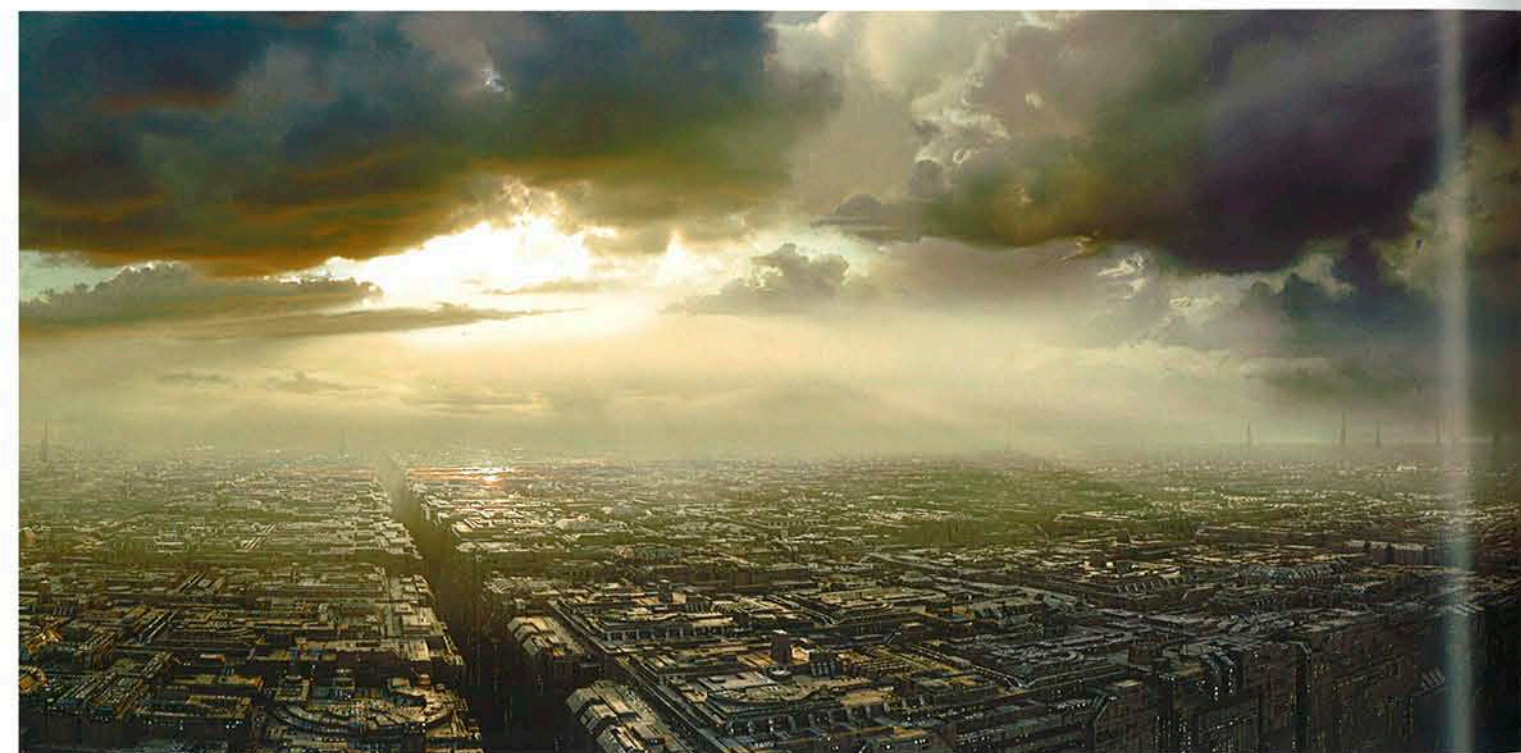
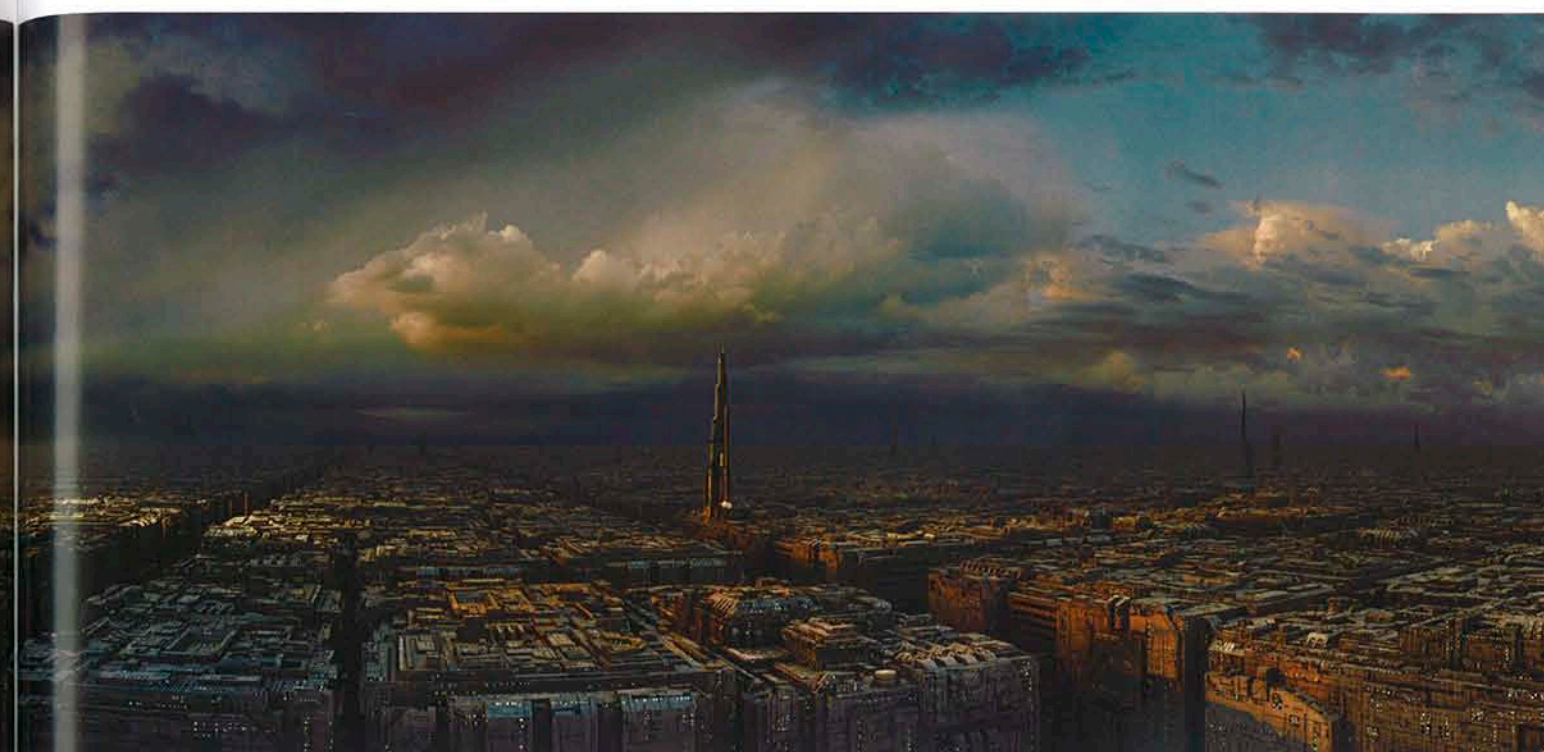
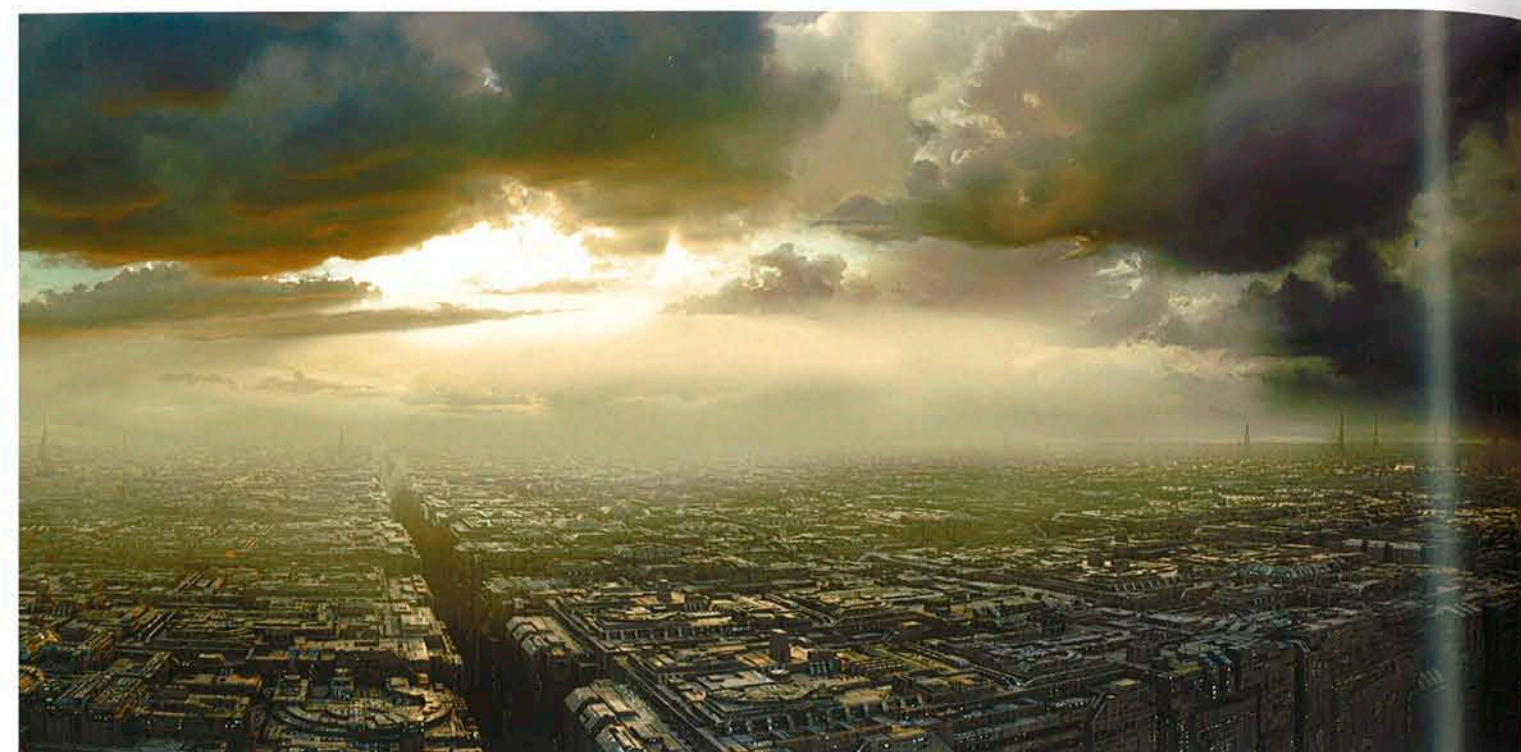
The approaching storm

Since the approaching storm plays a significant role in this matte painting, I started by painting and preparing a sky to use. Typically the perfect panoramic sky is difficult to find and photograph, so I stitched a few photos together and proceeded to paint the rest of the desired look. I then placed it behind the Ambient Occlusion pass of the Coruscant surface. Adding cool values to this pass is important as it simulates the cool light from the sky above. These values can be derived from the blue and green values in the skies palette.



Bringing it all together

Next I started to use the Sun Keylight pass. Here, you can see how I used it on the surfaces of the metal building tops. Even though the pass simulates even sunlight on the entire city, you can use it to light the city anyway you wish. For example, I used the Sun Keylight pass in three steps. First, I lit the left side of the painting with a warm yellow color. Second, I lit the right side of the painting with a warm orange color. Lastly, I removed patches of sunlight all around the painting to once again reveal the Ambient Occlusion pass and simulate cloud shadows. Some of the more subtle details shown here in this progress frame are the addition of the glow below the sun and slightly darker canyons correlating with the sun shadows. Finally, I darkened the horizon on the right side of the painting to begin to tie the sky and the architecture together in the distance.



Protecting the sky

The area under the sun needed more treatment. I applied the Fog pass to both it and the distant horizon on the right. Notice that the fog doesn't affect the foreground. This is because I moved the effects of the Fog pass in areas where it was necessary—very similar to the way I created cloud shadows in the previous chapter. This works well on the right because it helps to illustrate the less visible areas in the distant shadow. However, when using the Fog pass on the left under the sun, it's necessary to apply it on a layer underneath the Sun and light pass so it doesn't completely dull

the highlights. I also continued working on the metal building tops on the left side to further the believability of the top surfaces' metal qualities. In fact, the overall idea of getting some general sky color reflection in the metal elements are starting to show here. In the areas where there are hotter, brighter parts of the sky, I tried to reflect a warmer color in the metal. This is also true with the cooler, darker parts of the sky and the correlating blue reflection on the surfaces. These hand-painted additions to the painting are achieved using the Tops pass and supplement the

pools of light that were painted earlier. Lastly, I decided to remove a few of the pools of light on the right side. It made more sense because so much of the sky was filled with clouds it seemed that the sun wouldn't really cast that much light on the surfaces. This is a perfect example of how the sky dictates much of what should happen in the rest of the matte painting.

Hand-painting

The changes seen here in the final matte painting are all hand-painted. I didn't use the passes for the following changes. Using the passes definitely has its advantages, but it's also important to know when to hand-paint things to get the organic elements you need. The rays of sunlight are coming through clouds and though they should be painted straight, they appear more real when they are of different sharpness and transparency. I also added a few brighter sun reflections in the metal surfaces in the distance right below the sun itself. On the right side of the

painting I felt that some of the clouds were a bit too dark so I simply painted a lighter layer over the top of them. I determined that the darker values in the clouds at the center of the painting were eventually going to be hidden behind a column. Since they wouldn't show up in the final shot, I didn't waste time tweaking them further. Since much of the distant right side of the painting seemed to be too dark and lacked depth, I painted in more fog and atmosphere. As a result, it raised the distant black levels to a grey color and in places I painted enough fog to break the

horizon line. Adding this type of chaos to the scene helps pull it away from the 'computer-generated' look and bring it closer to a more natural and photo-realistic one. Taking cues from the color of elements like clouds at sunset can also help you determine values for your painting and help achieve the goal of a photo-realistic environment. Using photographs for clouds, compositing real people into the shot and taking advantage of complex CG models all help to make your matte painting appear more real—especially within the time constraints of a movie production schedule.



MATTE PAINTING: GOLDEN GATE

ration

I live and work in the San Francisco Area, creating a matte painting of the Golden Gate bridge in a snow storm was an interesting project. One of the most important aspects of creating this matte painting was to take photographs of the area at a foggy time of day and try to avoid sunshine.

Technique

When painting the snowfall on the bridge I tried to keep it somewhat random and natural as well as having the colour and intensity falloff as it recedes into the distance. The chaotic painted snow accumulation in the foreground parking lot and on the rooftop was inspired by looking at photo-reference of similar subject matter.

Starting point

The final result called for snow and fog, so that determined the conditions I needed to shoot in. If the bridge was shot in direct sun, I would have to paint out the shadows. This would have taken a long time considering the structure of the bridge, not to mention the overall effect direct light has on the water itself.



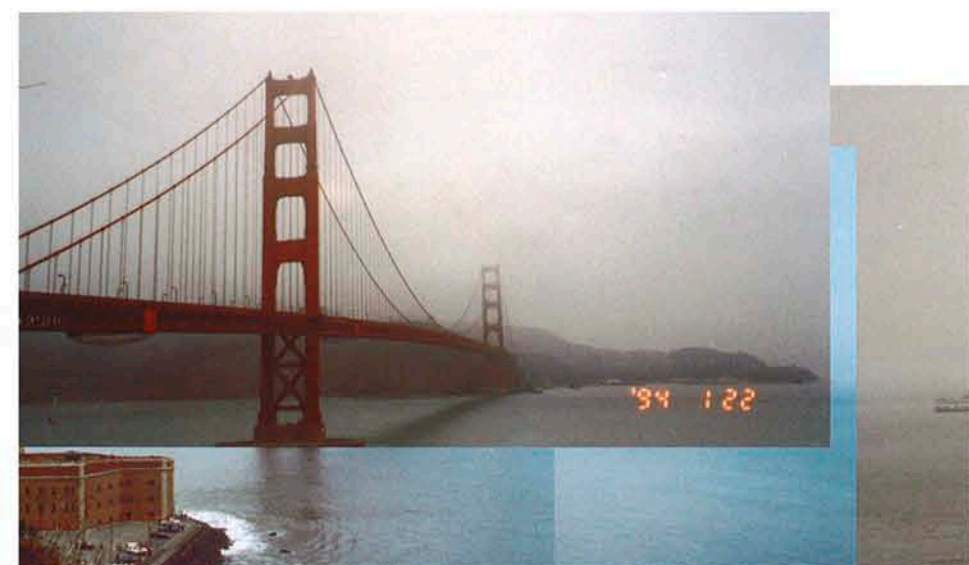


Photo reference

Getting the photos of the bridge in fog helped a great deal. If for instance, the bridge was shot in direct sun, I would've had to paint out all the sun and shadows throughout the shot. This would've taken a long time especially considering all the cables and trusses on the bridge, not to mention the overall effect direct light has on the water itself.



Fixing the perspective

I stitched the images together and color-corrected them. Since the final shot would be one plate and not many photos stitched together it wouldn't make sense for the far tower to be leaning in perspective the way it does in the original photo. I decided to remove the 'lean' and keep all my verticals in the painting true.



Keeping it cool

I continued to color-correct the image and started to hand-paint fog into the shot. Since it would be a snowy scene, I chose to keep the color palette cool.

Snow layers

When painting the snow it was important to choose a cool color that reflected the overall ambient light. Since I already established a color palette, I could paint the body of snow on its own layer, then tweak the colour until I thought it suited the rest of the scene. I kept the painted snow on the bridge members and distant hills on their own layers so I wouldn't lose the ability to edit them. When painting the snowfall on the bridge I tried to keep it random and natural as well as having the colour and intensity falloff as it receded into the distance. The chaotic painted snow accumulation in the foreground parking lot and on the rooftop was inspired by looking at photo-reference of similar subject matter. I find this is the best way to keep the matter painting from looking too artificial.



Leading the viewer

Looking at the layout of the snow on the bay, I decided it was good for the composition of the shot. The water that stretched from between the towers of the bridge seemed realistic and the line it creates acted as a subtle pointer to the focal point. Conveniently, the deck of the bridge also directed the eye to the foreground tower of the bridge, and even some of the lines in the foreground building curve in that direction. Lastly, the opening below the tower not only pointed up at the focal point, but also revealed complex reflections of the tower itself in the water.



Details

Once I felt the composition was strong I proceeded to paint details into the body of snow and ice on the bay. Looking at more realistic reference I created subtle highlights and shadows within the small terrains of the snow. I also added small floating icebergs in the distance and started to finesse the openings in the ice. As a work in progress, you'll notice the small dark rocks that I painted in the snow. I took cues from the rocks that were in the water in the photographs, but later removed these elements as I thought they were distracting.





Snow particles

I used a particle generator to create a CG snowflake element that I later composited over the final shot. Shown here against blue and without motion blur, the flakes are a simple star shape, but the velocity, roll and wind gusts all help make the final shot more believable.



Snow in motion

Here you can see the snow with motion blur composited over the painting giving a sense of movement and wind.



Complexity and chaos

The final matte painting shows the many CG snow elements composited. The large number of flakes falling also added to the foggy atmosphere. Using many snowflake elements with varying wind gusts, and chaos brought life and motion to the shot. Ultimately, complexity and chaos helped make the matter painting appear more realistic.





Treehouses/Night time
 Cinematic matte painting, CINEMA 4D
 by d'artiste, Crabb Digital.

Stoski

g an architectural background
 always enjoyed paintings that
 a strong and creative 'sense of
 . This is a term some architects
 o depict an architectural or
 cape design that can be
 ming and encourage the visitor
 lore the exciting elements that

have been designed. It is not merely
 a space, but a place. I always appreciate
 when artists take the time to design a
 shot in this manner. These treehouses
 and their connecting bridges would be a
 marvelous place to visit. The view of the
 distant mountains peeking through the
 edge of the forest is a fantastic design.



pc
Esprite, Xfrog, Photoshop
as **Juul Krahn**,
IARK
3/

Northern Wastelands
Photoshop
Mogens Skjold Overbeck,
UNITED KINGDOM
[right]

Stoski
of my favorite matte paintings
extreme weather conditions. One
benefits to being a matte artist is
control of the weather in your
Here, Thomas not only uses the
exity of the computer-generated
I mentioned earlier, but he adds
dense fog to the scene resulting
autiful and natural valley. The cool
color palette he's used reminds
chilly mornings I've spent in the
ian Rocky Mountains and evokes
realistic sense of what it's like to
in these conditions.

Chris Stoski
This painting has many elements that
I feel are successful. Growing up in
Canada, I've spent a great deal of time
in winter scenarios such as these. The
drifts of snow with small pockets of
grass, dirt and rock poking through are
all realistic elements. The contrast of
the distant tower against the sky helps
pull the eye toward it. The colors of the
sunrise on the horizon blend wonderfully
with the palette of cool blues. The
ground fog that hasn't yet been burned
off by the sun are all details one sees
and feels when they are immersed in
an environment such as this. I think this
is a very successful composition. The
foreground figure standing in the snow is
placed in the corner of the shot, but not
too close to the corner. Also, the main
tower is placed at one of the paintings
imaginary vertical third lines.



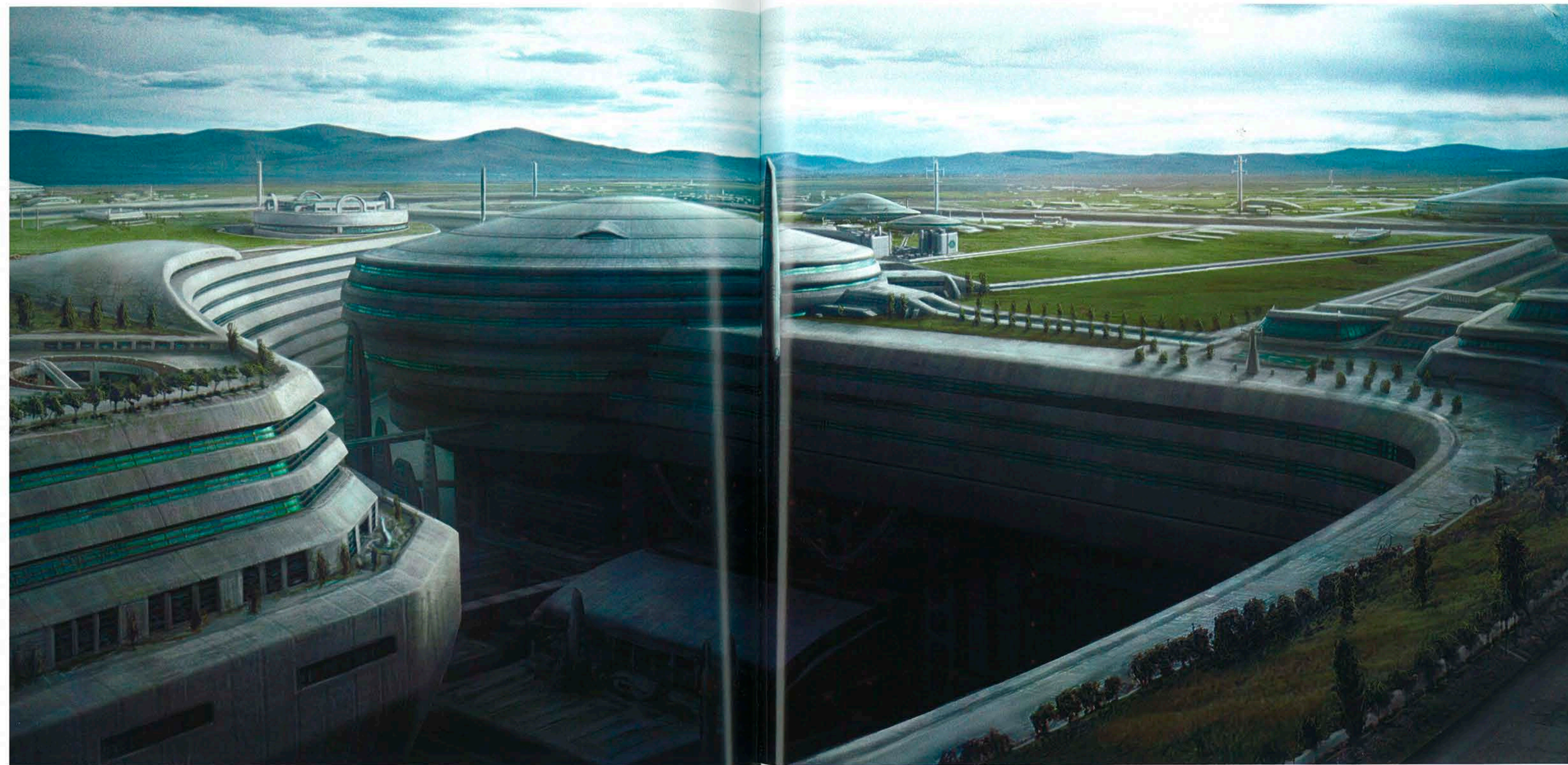


Midnight
shop, Maya
Brisbane,

Stoski

matte painting has the audience
right into the Mausoleum.
he way the moonlight illuminates
surrounding tombstones with
blue light and the texturing of

the tombstones is very realistic.
Perhaps the most intriguing part of the
shot is the dark doorway. It makes one
wonder what's lurking in the darkness
and what's about to happen?



e City
Photoshop
n Cottman,

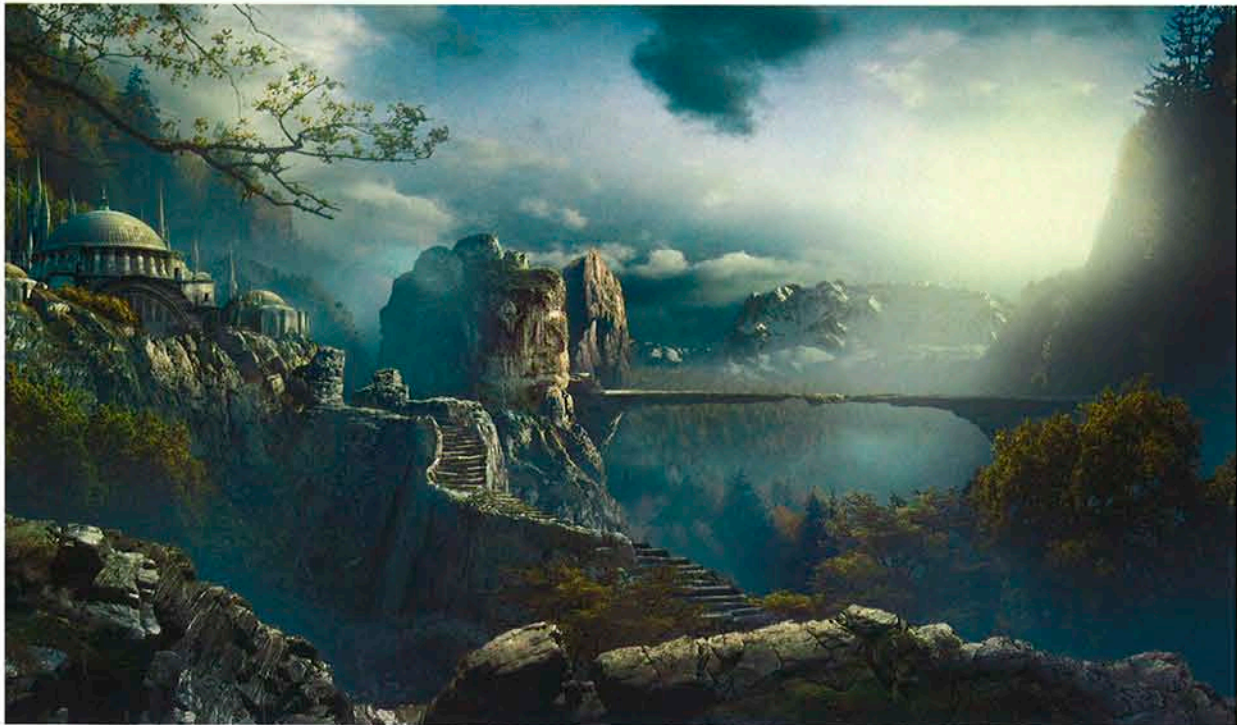
Stoski

Composition of this shot is very
successful. The painting shows off the
structure and scale cleanly and my
led to the main structure with the
Composition is a key element to a
successful matte painting. If the eye isn't
the right parts of the painting, an
amazing shot fails to do its job.



House
shop, Maya
Brisbane,

Stoski
house has a lot of great old
ered features. The rooftops and
are all tattered and missing pieces,
he overgrown vegetation help the
the scene more realistic.



Bridge at Kipi
shop
ns Skjold Overbeck,
ID KINGDOM

Stoski
rest in this painting starkly
asts the sharp detailed
ation you find with a 3D CG
lowever, it communicates the

concept successfully. The bridge
and river in the foreground draw
my attention first with their sharper
detail and slightly more saturated
coloration. Then the soft ambient
light of the overall painting sets the
mood of the shot. The color palette
is very successful; the colors of the
distant forest and hills almost
merge as the air is thick and gray
with atmosphere.

Fantasy
Photoshop
Sarry Long,
FRANCE
[above]

Chris Stoski
This painting has a few parts that
I think would work nicely for
several shots. Since it illustrates
the winding stairway, the palace

and the bridge on the right, a
Director could use this painting
in many smaller camera pans.
I'd love to see a frame with
people walking up the stairs,
and as the camera pans up
and left, the palace is revealed.
Laying out a large painting like
this leaves many opportunities
to create different compositions
from one piece.



Mantra
Vue d'Esprit, Xfrog, Photoshop
Thomas Juul Krahn,
DENMARK

Chris Stoski
Thomas knows how to hide details
in the shadows and fog. He lets the
viewer's imagination fill in the detail.
Also, framing the edges of the frame
with darker values allows for a clear
and concise focal point without losing a
feeling of peripheral vision.



Castle
shop
Crabb, Crabb Digital,

Stoski
is a nicely painted castle. The details
of snow resting on various bricks,
how the structure rests in the cliff
and the overall soft ambient light
help sell its believability. I particularly
like the layers and levels created here.
This is another painting with a good

'sense of place'. One would enjoy
exploring this castle. The crane-like
element on the right appears to support
an elevator-type pod that can be lowered
down below into the fog. This is a fun
and well-executed piece.



ra
Esprit, Xfrog, Photoshop
as Juul Krahn,
ARK
s/]

Far East
Photoshop
Stephane Belin,
CANADA
[right]

Stoski
CG world, developing successful
ved vegetation in large quantities
oming more and more common.
like Thomas are not only using
pls to create complex jungles and
i, but composing them creatively
w the eye to the focal point of the
here, the backlit leaves and rocks
the eye to look into the distance
udy the waterfalls and warm light
sts over the valley. All along, the
und trees and palms quietly play
le by framing the shot.

Chris Stoski
I like the drama of this shot. The soldiers
marching in the foreground emphasize
the scale of the grand architecture in the
distance. The colors in the sky and the
way the sunlight bleeds into the building
elements are wonderful.





Towers
 Shop
 rabb, Crabb Digital,

Stoski

g realistic and unusual sci-fi
 cture can be challenging—
 ally with unique forms such as
 pointed domes. However, the
 of these towers are painted with
 r and texture that appears to
 ive to this environment. Painting

these elements in a warm stone or adobe
 color helps to unite them with the rocks.
 This helps the viewer buy the fact that
 these structures could really exist here.
 The lighting color, angle and bounce
 light also work well to integrate the
 structures into the rest of the scene.



2
shop
WANDA
Long, FRANCE

Stoski

composition, color palette and execution of the elements are one here. The painting is painted it a great deal of color which support the bleak emotion evoked the destruction and ruins of the city.

The distant skyline of towers is placed at one of the composition's imaginary vertical third lines. Lastly, the girl's skirt is the only clean white element in the painting and it draws the viewer's attention to her as she walks down the channel.

Daily Planet
Photoshop
Chris Thunig,
GERMANY
[above]

Chris Stoski

The way the sunlight illuminates this room is very nice. The light glows bright at each window and softer as it bounces through the space. Complex shadows in a scenario like this helps fool the viewer into thinking what they are looking at is real.

SF Apple Flagship Store
3ds max, Photoshop
Client: Apple Computers Inc.
Mark Dessert, USA
[top]

Chris Stoski

Before I became a matte painter, I worked in architectural illustration. Many of the challenges for that job apply to matte artists. The Apple Store is added to this scene and like many architectural illustrations nowadays it has been built as

a 3D model. The lighting and integration into the scene is what makes it believable. Layering the clutter like street lamps, people and overhead cables over the building help set the store into place. Mark also took cues from the environment to plan the color of the lighting. The building has an ambient cool, blue light with a few yellow and pink lights that make it appear very realistic. Lastly, the soft reflection of the signage is visible in the buildings metal walls further illustrating the type and texture of material on the surfaces.

EARTHSEA
Photoshop
Copyright Hallmark Entertainment
Distribution, LLC
Rasoul Shafeazadeh, CANADA
[above]

Chris Stoski

This little village with its thatched rooftops and varied building placements is painted nicely. Its complexity of huts, texture and layout make it appear realistic. Seeing the rough edges of

the painting reminds me of the old traditional matte paintings before they were composited with their plate and people walking throughout.



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1820s Erie Canal Town
Photoshop, 3ds max
Client: Excel Entertainment Group
Scott Brisbane, Matte World Digital,
USA

Chris Stoski
This is a fine period piece. Scott's matte painting and architectural extensions are very believable and the water replacement is great. The bustling street and roadside clutter add to the complexity of the overall shot. The artists at Matte World always know how to create a great matte painting.

A



itiner
rnia,
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7

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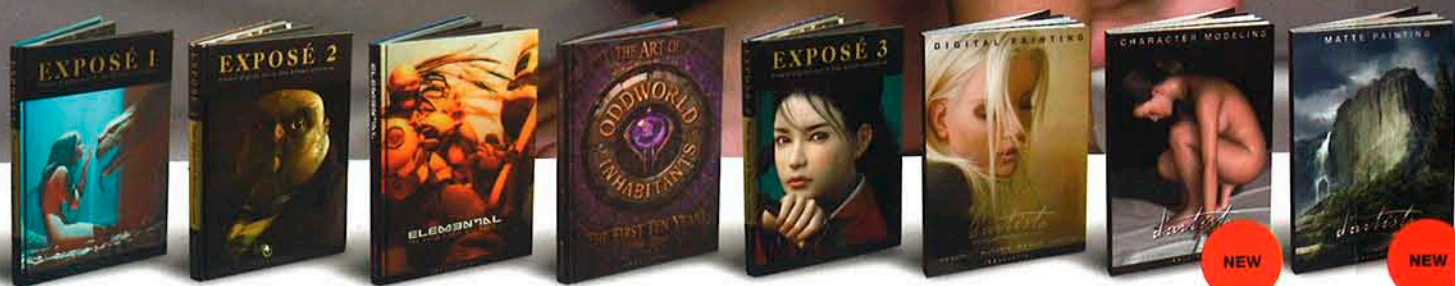
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